

DISCIPLESHIP DEVELOPMENT THAT
TRANSFORMS CONGREGATIONAL
NORMS

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ABSTRACT

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The context of this project was the Ardis Chapel Church, which focused on maintaining a yearly routine of activities to define itself as a functioning church, rather than on disciple-making and fulfilling the Great Commission. If the members participate in a focus study on Christian discipleship, they will be equipped with the tools necessary to disciple others. There were six sessions presenting discipleship training. The qualitative data collection included pre-survey, post-survey, journaling, and polls. The results will be incorporated into future training materials. The completion of the project led this church to embrace the Great Commission.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I begin by expressing my deepest gratitude to God for His grace and mercy, which granted me the discernment and strength to complete this doctoral project. This journey has profoundly shaped my understanding of discipleship and renewed my spirit with clarity and purpose.

I extend sincere appreciation to my mentors, Dr. Jonathan McReynolds and Dr. Anita Coleman, whose guidance and unwavering support sustained me through every challenge. I am also grateful to Dr. Abraham for his wisdom and counsel, which provided direction at critical moments, and to Dr. Lori Spears for her expertise in editing and refining this work. To Mary Marlin, Contextual Associate, thank you for your support at Ardis Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church. To Rev. Dr. Debra Hall Goodlet, my professional associate: thank you for your guidance and encouragement. To my Peer Associate, you have been with me from the beginning and have kept me lifted up, even when it seemed I wouldn't allow myself to give up.

To my peers, thank you for the encouragement that fostered resilience and hope throughout this process. I am equally indebted to my family for their steadfast support and motivation, which enabled me to persevere.

Finally, being accepted into the seminary was both life-giving and transformative. It afforded me the opportunity to integrate my personal journey into a scholarly endeavor that reflects growth, faith, and purpose.

DEDICATION

This work and research are dedicated to my husband, Rev. Dr. Grant Harrison, Jr.; my mother, Ms. Betty Fortson; my father, Rev. Levi Reid; my siblings; and my extended family, for your support throughout the years. My home church, Marable Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church, was an excellent training ground for me in my formative years, with Mrs. Betty Black playing a significant role in my development as a Zionite on all levels of the church. Thanks to my mother for bringing my twin sister Paula and me to Marable and for supporting us as we matured in the faith. She has been a great support to me most of my life. This work is also dedicated to Loulena London, affectionately called Momma Lou, who loved me unconditionally as if I were her biological daughter, and to her son, Barry, for accepting me into the family.

Special thanks to my clergy colleagues who challenged and encouraged me through this journey called pastoral ministry. To the churches I have been blessed to serve as pastor, thank you so much for helping me grow as a woman of God. You shared your faith with me and gained practical experience that has led to the development and implementation of this project. Thank you, Bishop Darryl B. Starnes, Sr., for my most recent pastoral appointments and your contribution to the course of study of this doctoral project. Thanks to my Ardis Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church family for participating in the development and implementation of my projects. To my Contextual associate, Mary Marlin, for being very supportive of my doctoral journey. To Rev. Dr. Debra Goodlett for

being there to guide me through my doctoral project. Thanks again to my husband, Dr. Grant Harrison, Jr., for encouragement from my trial sermon and first licensing to preach, and through the years that followed, as pastor, Presiding Elder, and spouse. I love you dearly.

May God grant all these dedicated souls, and others, who have been there for me in the trying times, in the times when it would have been easy to give up. Our faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has and will see us through this early sojourn, that we will join the significant number someday, when “the Shout breaks out, on the banks of an unclouded glory!”

ABBREVIATIONS

AME	African Methodist Episcopal
AMEZ	African Methodist Episcopal Zion
FACT	Families and Communities Together
WHOMS	Women's Home and Overseas Missionary Society

Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

INTRODUCTION

Chapter one, Ministry Focus, addressed that the church's primary work to grow the universal church by making disciples. The members of Ardis Chapel A. M. E. Zion Church were making disciples of the people they encountered from the surrounding community. This problem statement led to the following hypothesis: If the members participate in a focus study on Christian discipleship, then they will be equipped with the tools necessary to disciple other people.

The individual foundational studies provided an appropriate undergirding for the implemented project to come that prayerfully helped Ardis Chapel Church become the discipling church it should be.

Ministry Focus

My project theme was the development of a disciple-making focus as the number one priority of Ardis Chapel Church. A primary goal was to ensure that disciple-making was considered the most important factor in the ministries of the church. Whereas previously, disciple-making may have been seen as the work of the ministers, this approach required the participation of the entire membership. The implementation process began with a meeting of the members and the pastor, where I presented the need for a renewed overall ministry goal focused on the Great Commission, Matthew 28:18-20. I emphasized that disciple-making was why we were here as a church and that it

should not be approached haphazardly. In this sharing, I also emphasized the importance of each member's conversion experience and how it, along with several agreed-upon steps in the process, was needed for us to be successful.

Biblical Foundations

Having been assigned to the pastorate of Ardis Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, a historic church in my home district, I found myself pastor of many people I have known for years. As I looked closely at the church's organizational plan and began to observe the attendance patterns of the members and their extended families, I realized that the maintenance ministry could easily describe the yearly routine of Ardis Chapel.

Prayerfully considering scriptural support for my anticipated doctoral project's focus on evangelism as the primary focus of the church, I was led to Matthew 28:19-20.

In my initial reading of this text, I was struck with the power of two action words, go and disciple. Several scholars' studies emphasized the importance of clearly defining these terms for modern-day Christians. The word go, while sounding like a command, was actually more accurately translated going. Jesus' directive was as you are going, your work is to make disciples. Furthermore, disciples are more than students, but rather they are those who become attached to a teacher, following his or her lifestyle and the teachings they embrace. Thus, those that seek to disciple must be comfortable with people becoming their close associates and, in many ways, copies of themselves.

A part of our mandate as individual Christians is to first have all, reflect the character of Jesus to those we seek to disciple. This seeing who Jesus is and what He is like, from the perspective of the unchurched is a challenge, for the world spends a lot of

time defining what a Christian is like. Many Christians best thought actions have been challenged as being unlike Christ. The biblical foundation text gives Christians clear directions as to what Jesus expects of both current and future members of the church. This was a distinct privilege.

Historical Foundations

Chapter Three, Historical Foundations, explored the life of Rev. John Wesley, a child of the parsonage who grew up to be the founder of the Methodist Movement and Church. Scholars show us that he led a structured, ordered life from his childhood on. Discipline was a factor in his view of the Christian life. It played a major role in what he expected of those who joined the societies of early Methodism. John left his homeschooling at an early age, only to enter higher education and find himself uncertain about where he stood as a Christian.

The college life of order and study appealed to John. It helped him reach out to others who had similar interests. It also helped John embrace the life of a minister. John's efforts to reach out to like-minded individuals at school led to regular meetings to plan the Christian way of life, such as doing charitable works, visiting prisoners, helping the poor, and other things.

In his overseas missionary trip to the Georgia colony, John witnessed the bold strength of the Moravians, aboard a ship during a storm. He began to associate with them, learning German and being asked probing questions like "Do you know Jesus Christ?" And "Has he saved you?" Answering these questions was not as easy as a college-trained Christian minister might think. Once back home in England, John had a signature pivotal

the moment when he went to a meeting in Aldersgate Street and experienced his conversion, “feeling his heart strangely warmed.”

Wesley emphasized that the answers to challenges we face, as Christians, were found in one book. For example, he advised new converts to spend at least two hours every day in reading and meditating upon the Bible each day by our standards, two hours of study of the Bible, each day, might be a challenge, but at the same time, it can be seen as a goal to reach. May our study of the Word not take a back seat to the study of the world, which we spend an inordinate amount of time doing.

Theological Foundations

Chapter Four, Theological Foundations, examined the key points that support the project proposal hypothesis: developing and implementing a course of study to make disciples from the community of the church I pastor. I started with the conclusion that the local church is indeed the center of the disciple-making process, for conversion, baptism, and teaching happen there. Another key point was the importance of how a local church should function. The descriptive term, “The church-as-organized collective,” was offered to address the need for leadership and followership in the work of the church. We must emphasize that the priesthood of all believers, as taught in 1 Peter 2:9, supports work for both laity and clergy in the Great Commission. Too many of our laity were more than satisfied to put disciple-making totally in the hands of the clergy. These lay members defined for themselves what Christian service is, which also leads to maintaining the status-quo mindset. Such thinking was a problem especially when new clerical leadership

comes with a new vision. Promoting “the church-as-organized collective” helped leaders and followers jointly share in this important work.

It was important for the church to own the defining process, answering the question why do we do, what we do? I was sensitive to those occasions when the world tries to define what a Christian should be and what the church should be. We must remain faithful to the word of God, as we follow the directive that God has given us to live by and disciple by. At the same time, there is the additional challenge of doing ministry in a hierarchical church, where each local church is expected to be a community church and one amenable to several levels above it. The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church is an example of a hierarchical church, with many local churches making up districts. When the members of such a local church seldom, if ever, attend and share in activities on the levels above itself, they can be described as receiving a pastor from their denomination but refusing to be a part of their denomination. Thus, pastors and leading laity must advocate for an approach to disciple-making that covers all levels of the church.

Interdisciplinary Foundations

Chapter Five, Interdisciplinary Foundations, explored leadership development examples from the business world as a means by which the church can look at discipleship training from a different point of view. One of the reference books that I studied was *The Way of the Shepherd: Seven Secrets to Managing Productive People*, which showed us that there are models we can follow from nonbiblical sources in the disciple-making process. The business world offered us examples of employee training methodologies that are applicable to developing a course of study for disciple-making in

a local church. Proctor and Gamble's method of indoctrinating their employees will be the basis of the Interdisciplinary Foundations chapter. It has been said that Indoctrinating is to Proctor and Gamble what discipling is to Christianity.

While some church members, particularly some officers, think that a church should not be run like a business, I have found that the business model can be helpful to a successful program of church operations. It is necessary to become more sensitive to the definitions of leadership and management, and how easy it has been to use the words synonymously. Some people in charge, be it church or the business world, want to be the one that develops and controls the project, the procedures and the outcome, without input, ownership or accountability from those in the team. There needs to be a "leadershift" to a new paradigm of partnering leader and team to promote growth with existing workers and the creation of new leaders. The goal is to create an environment that fosters the norm of leaders among leaders.

Several new insights have been gained from the study of the business management world that can empower church members and leaders in the work of disciple making. One of the insights that will be embraced is employee engagement, or, as I could call it, member engagement. Employee engagement was defined in one reference as being highly motivated to do what is necessary to accomplish the mission. Think of this definition with the word employee replaced by church member. At the conclusion of the project, it would be a positive result to witness engaged church members, regularly making disciples.

Project Analysis

Chapter Six, Project Analysis, presented the project as created, designed, and implemented. This chapter presented the course of study to be addressed weekly by the context associate and professional associate. The focus text was *The Perfecting of the Saints* by Bishop Darryl B. Starnes, Sr. The project theme was the development of a disciple-making focus as the number one priority of Ardis Chapel Church. We also needed to create a multi-generational, all-hands-on-deck approach to disciple-making. We noted that children were often overshadowed by the adults who brought them to church as if they were not capable of independent ministry. Also, at the other end of the spectrum, our senior members did not have the opportunity to share their witness and evangelize because of the assumed challenges they faced. Also, we set a yearly goal for conversions. Sadly, when the pastor reported the number of conversions, or souls saved, during our Quarterly Conferences, which usually cover ninety days, the answer was usually zero. We wanted this to change and set a target goal per quarter.

The project process began with a meeting of the members and pastor, where I presented the need for a renewed overall ministry goal focused on the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). The project process continued with calls to several meetings where class leaders were trained in disciple-making and, along with the pastor, helped develop the multi-generational components of the Ardis Chapel plan. A measure of this renewed overall ministry goal would be the number of souls saved and added to the ranks of disciple-makers.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

Chapter One reflected my ministry journey and the initial phase of implementation. The project is titled Discipleship Development that Transforms Congregational Norms. The members of Ardis Chapel A. M. E. Zion Church are not making disciples of the people they encounter from the surrounding community. If the members participate in a focus study on Christian discipleship, they were equipped with the tools necessary to disciple other people.

My ministry journey began in the year 1999 at Marable Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church, under the leadership of Reverend Grant Harrison. One day, in the summer of that year, I had a dream that seemed so real it was more like a vision. I was asleep when I was awakened by a vision. I looked all around the room. It was dark but around me was a bright light. I could see myself preaching and the words were coming from my stomach out of my mouth, so I ran to the bathroom, fell on my knees, and started praying to God about what I had seen and what I had heard. I had previously experienced the call in my twenties, but I dismissed it because I was too young and did not feel that it was real. This time it really got my attention because of the bright light, and I could not sleep. The next morning, I called my sister, who was a pastor, and told her what happened. She advised me to pray and seek God for clarity. Then, I met with my pastor, and we talked about my

experience. He told me about the steps that I would have to follow in moving forward into ministry. Those steps included instructions from the pastor, announcing to the church and the district my acceptance of the call, and setting the future trial sermon date.

Following my trial sermon, and with the recommendation of my pastor and my class leader, our quarterly conference requested the Presiding Elder to license me as a local preacher at our District Conference. I completed a course of study on the district level and was recommended to the Annual Conference for admission on trial. Several years of conference studies followed, which led to my deacon's and elder's ordinations. During this time frame, I was an associate minister at my home church, performing duties assigned by my pastor.

My professional work was that of a Certified Nursing Assistant. My place of employment was a nursing home, where I provided care for the patients with their daily needs, such as giving baths, putting on their clothes, and feeding those who could not feed themselves. My personal life was challenging. I was in an abusive marriage and had three children to raise.

As pastors are appointed on a year-to-year basis in the A.M.E. Zion Church, my pastor, now the Reverend Dr. Grant Harrison, was appointed to another church, and we received a new pastor. My relationship with the new pastor did not go well. After much prayer, I decided to transfer my membership to another church in the Lincolnton District of our conference. My pastoral ministry began in this district, where I subsequently pastored four churches. The first three pastorates were brief, and the fourth church was eight years. I started and completed my Master of Divinity degree at Hood Theological Seminary during my years in the Lincolnton District. I also began to think about

chaplaincy work during this time of my ministry. In the year 2015, I started doing the coursework requirements for becoming a chaplain. Today I am a Board-Certified Chaplain and a pastor back on my home district. I approached my Doctor of Ministry studies as a bi-vocational minister.

My new pastoral appointment at Ardis Chapel has been filled with spiritual excitement. I yearned to be at a church, that had members who were willing workers for Christ. During my first few weeks, I noticed that some of my church members were more than satisfied with the priority of works versus the priority of discipleship as a definition of what is expected of a Christian. I think this preference for the priority of works was the result of years of thinking about Ardis Chapel as being a training church for beginning pastors, where the laity is in survival mode, making sure the church's bottom line of financial obligations is met. Instead of following the mandate to make disciples, maintaining church growth became the process of babies being born and growing up to join in, and or take over, the work of their parents and grandparents. This thinking led to children's names being on the church roll that are seldom, if ever, seen in church. As the average age of our members increased and their numbers decreased, I saw it as a synergy project to promote and prioritize disciple-making, helping Ardis Chapel become uncomfortable with Sundays and other church gatherings without new faces.

Context

Ardis Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church was established in 1869 in the home of Brown Walker by Reverend Charles Ardis.¹ The house where the organization took place stood directly across Old Mocksville Road, west of the present structure. The members voted to keep the church in the community and to purchase it. With this small number of devoted members, Ardis Chapel became light within the community. “The first church building was erected in 1888, under the supervision of James Hawkins. Some of the builders were James Hawkins, Ned Hannah, Brown Walker, James Chunn, and Rev. Charles Ardis. On August 6, 1890, the trustees purchased the present site consisting of one acre, more or less, from Bishop C.R. Harris for the sum of \$30.”² Among its charter members and original trustees were Allen Correll, Brown Walker, James Chunn, and John Maghee. Some of the members of this church today are descendants of these people.

An unusual fact about the church is that one family, the Miller family, introduced to the church as children, had grown to be leaders, even though they are not descendants of the founding members. Reverend Dr. Calvin Miller states in an interview, “I was the first of my family to join Ardis Chapel. My parents were Presbyterian and Baptist, and we children attended different churches until I decided to join the church within walking distance of our home.”³

¹ Jacqueline Anthony, “Local Church History,” *Salisbury District-WNCC-PED*, 2025, <https://sdwnccamez.org>.

² Anthony, “Local Church History,” <https://sdwnccamez.org>.

³ Reverend Dr. Calvin Miller, interview by Carla Harrison, Salisbury, NC, October 28, 2023.

The present structure was built by the contractor, the late Conrad Bost, in 1982 and completed in 1983. The plans were designed and drawn up by the Reverend Dr. Calvin L. Miller, who is still a member and now Presiding Elder of the Winston-Salem District of the Western North Carolina Conference. Members Arthur and Jean Miller were the liaisons with Mr. Bost. Arthur is Reverend Dr. Calvin Miller's brother. His big brother Thomas Miller is chairman of the trustee board. Mary Marlin and Jean Miller, Reverend Dr. Calvin Miller's sister and sister-in-law, respectively, became the first female trustees of Ardis Chapel. The Millers remain an influential family in our church.

The Mortgage Burning Celebration Service was held on Sunday, March 21, 1993, under the leadership of Reverend Charles Tillett, Jr. The late Bishop Ruben L. Speaks, Senior Bishop and the Presiding Prelate of the WNCC/Piedmont Episcopal District, preached the sermon and presided over the mortgage burning. Further improvements to the physical plant included a new fellowship hall and renovation of the present structure in 2004; the remodeling of sidewalks and other groundwork; new stained-glass windows, donated by Reverend Dr. Miller and members in memory and honor of their loved ones in 2008; and the addition of a paved parking lot in 2014. Ardis Chapel has produced a long line of distinguished ministers, some of whom have gone to higher positions of service and leadership in our country. Among those persons were the late Bishop Raymond Luther Jones and the late Bishop Milton A. Williams. I serve as the current pastor, and my husband, Reverend Dr. Grant Harrison, serves as the Presiding Elder of the Salisbury District. Bishop Darryl B. Starnes, Sr., is the Presiding Prelate of the Piedmont Episcopal District, which includes the Western North Carolina Conference and the Salisbury District.

Ardis Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church is centrally located in a primarily upper-middle-class community in Salisbury, North Carolina, Salisbury is the county seat of Rowan County. Nearby all places of interest include a county club, a golf course, and the city hospital. There is also a community nearby called Hawkinstown, which historically was a black neighborhood. This community currently faces several houses being added and a future change in its makeup. “No two congregations are alike. Each gathering of people creates its own ways of doing things, its own ways of describing the world, and its own tools, and artifacts that produce its distinctive appearance. Congregations, in other words, are subcultures within a larger culture. They have distinct identities that can be seen in what they make and do together. Culture is who we are and the world we have created to live in.”⁴

Ardis Chapel’s membership is a mix of nearby dwellers and some a distance away. Overnight security matters have recently become a concern. We are in the middle of upper-middle-class housing, with not much community presence of a church. Our members, however, are well represented in the Interdenominational and A. M. E. Zion Connectional activities that take place in the Salisbury-Rowan community, such as Church Woman United-Rowan County, Meals on Wheels, and our own Woman’s Home and Overseas Missionary Society Departmental efforts are among the regular work of our church. Potentially, we can also get involved with “Families and Communities Together” (F. A.C. T.), a community service initiative started by two of our district A. M. E. Zion churches that currently has member churches of different denominations across the city

⁴ Nancy Ammerman, Carroll Jackson, Carl Dudley, and William McKinney, eds., *Studying Congregation: A New Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 78.

and county. Our area colleges, Livingstone College, Hood Theological Seminary, and Catawba College, also present many opportunities for further partnerships in community service.

Salisbury is a city in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. It has been the county seat of Rowan County since 1753 when its territory extended to the Mississippi River. Located twenty miles northeast of Charlotte and within its metropolitan area, the town has attracted a growing population. Much of the local church work in our denomination is the result of assigned projects that are handed down through the various levels of our hierarchical church structure. For example, our church missionaries collected an offering for Global Mission Sunday that has been reported to the Salisbury District Women's Home and Overseas Missionary Society (which shall be referred to as WHOMS) who in turn sent it to the Western North Carolina WHOMS, the Piedmont Episcopal District WHOMS and then finally to the A.M.E.Z WHOMS. Each level wants to satisfy their responsibility, and it all starts with the local church. At the same time, it is my challenge as a pastor to get my missionaries to also see that their work should include addressing needs and concerns that originate in Salisbury and Rowan County, such as Meals on Wheels and Rowan Helping Ministries.

This all leads to helping my congregation understand what it means to be a Christian in today's America and the World. "... A thousand years ago Amselm gave theology its classical definition: 'Theology is faith seeking understanding.'"⁵ I too believe that this is a good definition of theology, which helps me define, on an individual and congregational level, what it means to be a Christian. Defining the word "Christian"

⁵ Ammerman, Carroll, Dudley, and McKinney, *Studying Congregations*, 23.

is a group activity I seek to lead my church in, for it is too easy to embrace activities that are related to Christian life and fail to embrace the primary work of being a Christian, that of making disciples. Matthew 28:16-20, the Great Commission, outlines this primary work when Jesus calls on his followers to make disciples and baptize all nations in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. While some might think a local church had a good year of a series of well-attended worship services, successful fundraisers, and fellowship events, that church did not have a good year if no souls were saved. In the words of one of my colleagues - “The Soul is the Goal.”

We must promote a local church culture that keeps saving souls as a main objective. Ammerman says, “Culture is who we are and the world we have created to live in. It is the predictable patterns of who does what and habitual strategies for telling the world about the things held most dear... A congregation’s culture reminds us that it is something this group of people has created, not a fixed or normative category... Understanding a congregation requires understanding that it is a unique gathering of people of a cultural identity all its own.”⁶ Some of the predictable patterns of Ardis Chapel Church were re-electing the same officers each year; following the same plan of activities or calendar events each year; and family meetings to discuss local church planning.

I have found that my congregation responded to new ideas that will change the church’s culture when they are presented by the right person in the right manner. In that this was my first year as pastor, being the right person in the right manner might take a while, but prayerfully I will succeed, and others will join me. Every member of the

⁶ Ammerman, Carroll, Dudley, and McKinney, *Studying Congregation*, 78.

church will not be received as a cultural change agent, but when the ideas are put to the right people who support the change, things can happen. Bishop Darryl B. Starnes, Sr., our presiding prelate, in his lecture, “The Characteristics of a Christ-Centered Church,” emphasized that “the commitment to making disciples is the primary requirement for leadership in the church.”⁷

Ministry Journey

I was born and raised in Mt. Calvary Fire Baptized Holiness Church. The church membership had decreased, so my mother took my siblings and me to her boyfriend's church, Marable Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church. During this time, I had some very influential people in my life. These included my pastor Reverend Jones, Mrs. Betty Black, and Mrs. Ruth Curry. When I was twelve years old, Reverend Jones allowed me to read the scripture on a Sunday morning during worship service. I will never forget the scripture he told me to read, Psalm 23! Mrs. Black got me involved in the Christian Education Department's children and youth activities. Mrs. Ruth Curry was my Girl Scout leader. My mother expected me to be good and do as I was told by any adult member of the church. She did not drive, so church members would come and get me so that I would be able to participate in youth functions at the church. Being involved in the youth ministry helped me to understand my spirituality with God. As a young child, I knew there was something different about me, how I loved to worship the Lord. The Holy Spirit was like a warm sensation that would be all over me. I would not tell anyone

⁷ Darryl B. Starnes, Sr., “The Characteristics of a Christ-Centered Church” (class lecture, Little Rock A.M.E. Zion Church, Charlotte, NC, September 21, 2022).

because I thought people would laugh or did not understand, even though I did not understand at that time what I was experiencing myself. The desire to understand this feeling never went away.

My first experiences with a larger church community were attending revivals, gospel singing programs, monthly Sunday night fellowship worship services, and the like. This allowed me to see where my friends went to church and how similar or different the worship experiences were from church to church. For example, I learned that the communion elements are served differently in the Baptist Churches as compared to A.M.E. Zion Churches. This helped prepare me for future experiences in the ecumenical community.

Membership in the A.M.E. Zion Church calls for involvement on several levels of hierarchy, the local, district, Annual Conference, Episcopal area, and Connectional. Following the acceptance of the call to preach and preaching the initial sermon, the class leaders recommended to the quarterly conference that I be licensed to preach. This licensing was done by my Presiding Elder at the District Conference. After completing a course of study on the District level, I was recommended by the District Conference to be admitted on trial to the Annual Conference, entering another course of study that would lead to Deacon's and Elder's orders. There are two levels of ordination in my denomination. A Deacon is addressed as Reverend and can serve communion and participate in other activities. An Elder is addressed as The Reverend and can consecrate the communion elements and participate in other activities. Pastoral appointments can be made of local preachers, deacons, or elders at the discretion of the bishop.

When I answered the call into the ministry, my family, church members, and friends were very supportive. I continued my work at my home church for several years and then moved on to another district, where I subsequently received my first pastoral appointment. When I received my first pastoral appointment, I was nervous and excited at the same time. I went to the church, not knowing what to expect. Coming from a larger congregation to a church with less than ten members, I was disappointed. If this was my reality of pastoral ministry, it was not a pretty sight. Due to the fact I had a good support system, I was able to embrace the members with love and respect in my role as a pastor. My subsequent pastorates have been in similar settings and my work focused on maintenance ministry, with very few new initiatives. My current pastorate of Ardis Chapel prayerfully will be a change in this pattern.

Develop the Synergy

I concluded that Ardis Chapel Church needs to have a renewed overall ministry goal that is focused on “The Great Commission,” Matthew 28:18-20: “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age’” (Matt. 28:18-20).⁸

Dr. Robert E. Coleman, in his book *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, speaks to the urgency of making disciples when he says, “It is time that the church realistically face the

⁸ Biblical citations are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise stated, Matthew 28:18-20.

situation. Our days of trifling are running out. The evangelistic program of the church has bogged down on nearly every front, especially across the affluent Western world. In many lands, the enfeebled church is not even keeping up with the exploding population. All the while the satanic forces of this world are becoming more relentless and brazen in their attack. It is ironic when one stops to think about it. In an age when facilities for rapid communication of the gospel are available to the church as never before, there are actually more unevangelized people on earth today than before the invention of the horseless carriage.”⁹

Coleman’s 1993 contribution to classic works on evangelism causes us to wonder what he would have to say about the state of this most important Christian obligation in 2024! I do not think we can conclude that things have gotten any better nationally, let alone internationally, in this regard. I have also learned that the modern church suffers from what has been called Cultural Christianity. In his recent book, *The Unsaved Christian*, Dean Inserra asked the question, “How do you share your faith with people who call themselves Christians but don’t know Christ?”¹⁰ He goes on to say “cultural Christianity admires Jesus, but does not really think He is needed, except to ‘take the wheel’ in a moment of crisis.”¹¹ One of the challenges we face in sharing the Gospel is that some of the sharers are Cultural Christians, who have not gotten things right with God themselves and are willing to accept this same type of faith from their family,

⁹ Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell/Baker Publishing Group, 1993), 33-34.

¹⁰ Dean Inserra, *The Unsaved Christian: Reaching Cultural Christianity with the Gospel* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publisher, 2019), Jacket Note.

¹¹ Inserra, *The Unsaved Christian*, 14.

friends, church members, and the strangers God may send their way. Thus, a calling into account the salvation of current members becomes a part of a plan for a discipleship program.

We addressed this overall ministry goal of “making disciples” by starting with the training offered in *For the Perfecting of the Saints: A Handbook on Small Group Discipleship* by Bishop Darryl Brewster Starnes, Sr., Presiding Prelate of the Piedmont Episcopal District of the A.M.E. Zion Church. Commenting on the centrality of this issue, Bishop Starnes stated that while doing research for the work of his previous office, that of Director of Evangelism of our church. He learned that small group discipleship in general and the Class Meeting, in particular, were the means through which John Wesley had hoped to perfect the saints and spread scriptural holiness throughout the land...I began to challenge churches to rediscover and reclaim this small group phenomenon, which many other churches have begun to appreciate and implement, with great success.¹²

I pursued Bishop Starnes’s approach of training my class leaders, who in turn trained their class members, in the areas of concentration laid out in his book, while also supplementing this instructional material with other references pertinent to the subject at hand. Bishop Starnes rightly asserted that prioritizing disciple-making leads to a restoration of the integrity of the Church’s mission. He said that the most critical issues for each local church are a clear and accurate understanding of the Church’s mission and a genuine commitment to fulfill that mission. The mission mandate that Christ’s Church

¹² Bishop Darryl Brewster Starnes, Sr., *For the Perfecting of the Saints* (Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing, 2013), 15.

follows must come from Jesus Christ, its Lord...No minister, officer, board, church executive, or congregation has the right to give the church any mission other than that given by Christ.¹³

While my church, and many churches, were uncomfortable with the charge that they have replaced disciple-making, or failed to make it the number one priority, a review of our routine activities, our seasonal and annual focuses, and the practices we are identified by supporting the fact that other things challenge disciple-making as a priority. There is a financial obligation we face on the local, district, conference, and connectional levels and how the raising of funds can easily put other important work on the back burner.

Another challenge we faced, as a Black congregation in a historically Black denomination, was a narrowly defined mission target, that of reaching the Black community. Barna and Jackson, in their book *High Impact African American Churches* make the case that “Blacks are mission-minded people. However, their mission target is more narrowly defined than any Whites. In America, Blacks are intensely focused on reaching other Blacks, whether in their homeland or other nations of the world...When Blacks think about sharing their faith, they are most comfortable and most likely to share with other Blacks. The dominant emphasis is generally upon family members, including those outside the nuclear family.”¹⁴

I saw this focus very clearly in my church, for almost everything we did was family-focused and inreach versus outreach. As this chapter was being prepared, and

¹³ Starnes, *For the Perfecting of the Saints*, 29.

¹⁴ George Barna and Harry R. Jackson, Jr., *High-Impact African American Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2004), 114-115.

Advent-Christmastide events had occurred and were being planned, most of the activities were inside our church building, centered around our core membership and their families. We even had regular visits from the extended family of our members, where the visitor's church membership, or the lack thereof, was not brought up. Thus, even within our building on a Sunday morning, an opportunity for evangelism was missed because our people are too often satisfied with the status quo and did not want to make their family and friends uncomfortable. Yet, failing to share the gospel message ought to make us uncomfortable.

Continuing the theme of perfecting or equipping the saints for multiplication, Barna and Jackson also say, "there is little evidence of churches teaching people the one right way to share the gospel or criticizing unorthodox methods that produced good fruit. Admittedly, even the most effective churches have to work hard to get their people to attend evangelism-training events."¹⁵ They go on to say "high-impact churches encourage people to master their own story and to be ready to share it with those who need to hear the encouragement that story represents."¹⁶ This calls forth an interweaving of the gospel message and personal testimony of why it pays to serve Jesus.

Our instructional plan must then include ways in which each member can share the good news that "Jesus saves!" and give testimony that "I am a living witness to the need and the efficacy of salvation." I wanted my members to give those whom they shared the good news with a unique hope. "Hope is central to the Christian faith. Although it is often the final topic to be addressed in systematic theology, it would be a

¹⁵ Barna and Jackson, *High-Impact African American Churches*, 123.

¹⁶ Barna and Jackson, *High-Impact African American Churches*, 124.

mistake to consider hope as an addendum. It is rather the pinnacle of all Christian theological discourse...Hope, then, is the recognition and affirmation that God is the beginning and the end, and that Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega. Hope is the redemption of history.”¹⁷

These words, from James Evans, Jr.’s book *We Have Been Believers*, present a reality that can be very appealing to anyone who feels they have exercised all their options and are on the verge of giving up. Jesus says, of his kingdom, in Mark 10:31 “But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” How appealing then, should and could this gospel message be, when delivered by a witness who has been the last, as far as society is, concerned. When we, as Christians, realize that as “Christ’s kingdom is not of this world,” then we will begin to see potential citizenship being made up of “the last, not necessarily, the first,” and we will see how important it is to embrace the Great Commission of Matthew 28:16-20, as our chief priority.

In addressing the needs of “The Post Quarantine Church,” in his book by the same name, Thom S. Rainer challenges us to rediscover our church address. This means more than a physical address or a post office box number. He says, “most churches’ physical location should also be the hub of their ministry.”¹⁸ He encourages the reader to “be intentional about sharing the gospel...and having your members connect with people in

¹⁷ James H. Evans, Jr., *We Have Been Believers* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 165-166.

¹⁸ Thom S. Rainer, *The Post Quarantine Church* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2020), 44.

the community.”¹⁹ Embracing these two focal points will help Ardis Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church become a church that puts “First Things First,” the saving of souls.

Conclusion

The project theme was the development of a disciple-making focus as the number one priority of Ardis Chapel Church. We needed to create a process that will accomplish several goals, which would ensure that disciple-making was considered the most important factor in the ministries of the church. Whereas previously, disciple-making may have been looked upon as the work of the ministers, this approach will require the participation of the entire membership. It was important to develop a vision or mission statement that targets the community. While the disciple-making effort will bring new life into our local church, we promoted the fact that the community would benefit from a stronger, more vibrant congregation at Ardis Chapel. We also needed to create a multi-generational, all-hands-on-deck, approach to disciple-making. We noted that children were often overshadowed by the adults who brought them to church as if they were not capable of independent ministry. Also, at the other end of the spectrum, our senior members did not have the opportunity to share their witness and ability to evangelize because of the assumed challenges that they faced. Also, we should set a yearly goal for conversions. Sadly, when the pastor reports the number of conversions, or souls saved, during our Quarterly Conferences, which usually cover a ninety-day period, the answer is usually zero. We wanted this to change and would set a target goal per quarter.

¹⁹ Rainer, *The Post Quarantine Church*, 44.

The implementation process began with a meeting of the members and the pastor, where I presented the need for a renewed overall ministry goal that focused on the Great Commission, Matthew 28:18-20. I emphasized that disciple-making was why we are here as a church and that it should not be approached haphazardly. In this sharing, I also emphasized the importance of each member's conversion experience and how sharing it, along with several agreed-upon steps in the process, was needed for us to be successful.

The implementation process continued by calling class leaders to several meetings where they would be trained in disciple-making and, along with the pastor, help develop the multi-generational components of the Ardis Chapel plan. They would also train the members of their classes, showing them the small group evangelism advocated by Methodism's founder, John Wesley. After completing the development, we will implemented the process, with members to reporting to class leaders, and class leaders to report to the pastor, their level of success. We evaluated the disciple-making process and made needed improvements as we went along. A measure of the success of this renewed overall ministry goal would be souls saved and added to the ranks of disciple-makers.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Chapter two was a biblical reflection on Matthew 28:18-20, commonly referred to as the Great Commission, which serves as a foundational framework for understanding the mission and identity of the church addressed the concerns of the church's recently appointed pastor. The theme of this project is that members of Ardis Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church are not making disciples among the people they encounter in the surrounding community. In response, the project aims to affirm that if members participate in a focus study on Christian discipleship, they will be equipped with the tools needed to disciple others. This chapter on the biblical foundation has three parts: the introduction, the exegetical research, and the summary. The selected pericope, Matthew 28:19-20, will be the central biblical foundation for the project. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age,"(RSV). This pericope was chosen because it presents Jesus giving clear directions to his followers: go, teach, and baptize converts. That teaching material was all the things Jesus commanded them to do.

The exegetical research made up the main body of the chapter. The biography of Matthew and the general background of the other disciples and subsequent hearers or

readers was explored. Attention was given to the text as a medium of communication that may have originally been oral but moved to and now encounters us in written form. This study explored the text in several translations for differences over what words, phrases, or even verses are included as part of the original text.

To explore the original context of the pericope, secondary sources were examined to determine the date, historical background, and (in some detail) the purpose and message of the entire section in which the passage is found. The content of the pericope was studied to highlight the presence of such things as contrasts, similarities, repetition of keywords or phrases, and development in argumentation, both within the pericope and between the several pericopes that precede and follow our text.

The chapter ended with a summary that provides a clear and engaging overview consisting of two to four pages addressing the text, themes, and conclusions of the exegetical research. The summary indicated how the passage relates to and supports the broader doctoral project, particularly its problem statement and hypothesis.

Dave Buehring, in his book *The Great Opportunity: Make Disciples of Jesus in Every Vocation*, asks an interesting question: “Have you ever paused to consider your calling, where Jesus has uniquely appointed you to serve on behalf of Himself and His Kingdom within society? Another way to ask this is, how does Jesus express Himself through you as his personal ambassador to the world around you?”¹ In the Barna Group research, “they also found the word ‘calling’ is first associated with ministering to or

¹ Dave Buehring, *The Great Opportunity: Making Disciples of Jesus in Every Vocation* (Nashville, TN: Morgan James Publishing, 2021), 18.

serving others, with a subtle received hierarchy with ministry-related vocations at the top, and others at the bottom.”²

The word ‘calling’ is rooted in the Latin word ‘vocatio,’ from which we get the English word ‘vocation.’ Jesus intended that our vocation be the primary way of expressing our calling.³ Matthew 28:18-20 has been called “the Great Commission.”

Edward Hindson goes on to say, concerning verse nineteen, that:

The goal of missions is to ‘teach all nations.’ The idea is to make disciples. The commission of Christ’s followers is not just to tell the story and move on but to create churches as faith communities, where living out the Christian life becomes the basis for the evangelization of the world.⁴

It was the goal of this biblical foundation chapter to examine the message and application of Matthew 28:18-20, so that the presentation would clearly present to the church the vision Jesus gives us in the text, so that fulfilling its mandate will be the top priority for all members.

Exegetical Research

The Authorship of Matthew for our text and the gospel was seldom disputed in early times.

The early church fathers were unanimous in holding that Matthew, one of the twelve apostles, was the author of this gospel. In addition, every early manuscript of Matthew that has been preserved attributes the gospel to him. No one in the early church ever suggested that anyone else was the author. Matthew is quoted

² Buehring, *The Great Opportunity*, 49.

³ Buehring, *The Great Opportunity*, 8.

⁴ Edward E. Hindson and Daniel R. Mitchell, general editors, *King James Version Bible Commentary for Today* (Nashville, TN: Harper Collins Christian Publishing, Inc, 2010), 1270.

by Ignatius as early as AD 110 and is quoted by various church fathers more than Mark or Luke.⁵

Some modern critical scholars argue that Matthew's gospel content relied too heavily on Mark, leading them to challenge Matthew's authorship.

Why, they ask, would Matthew, an eyewitness to the events of the Lord's life, depend so heavily on Mark's account? The best answer seems to be that he agreed with it and wanted to show that the apostolic testimony to Christ was not divided. In addition, writers often seek an outline to help them in their work, even when they are familiar with the subject. Mark offered a convenient and accurate framework for Matthew's work.⁶

It is important to understand Matthew's notoriety and power before he accepted the call to follow Jesus.

The great outstanding fact about Matthew was that he was a taxgatherer. That word has changed its meaning in ordinary English usage. In the Gospels, it is derived from the Latin word 'publicanus, which meant a man who was engaged in public service, and especially a man who handled public money, and therefore taxgatherer...Of all nations the Jews were the most vigorous haters of taxgatherer. For a strict Jew, God was the only person to whom it was right to pay tribute; to pay tribute to anyone else was to infringe the prerogative which properly belonged to God.' Murderers, robbers and taxgatherers were classed together. A taxgatherer was debarred from being either a witness or a judge. He was even debarred from worship, which was why the taxgatherer in the parable stood afar off (Luke 18:13). Even repentance itself was regarded as being especially difficult for a taxgatherer.⁷

As an employee of the Roman government, Matthew collected taxes with extreme power. Yet, Matthew's skill with the use of a pen enabled him to "become the first man to present to the world an account of the teaching of Jesus. It would clearly be impossible to overestimate the debt we owe to this once despised Matthew."⁸ His gospel centers on

⁵ Hindson and Mitchell, *King James Version Bible Commentary for Today*, 1197.

⁶ Hindson and Mitchell, *King James Version Bible Commentary for Today*, 1197.

⁷ William Barclays, *The Master's Men* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1991), 59.

⁸ Barclays, *The Master's Men*, 65.

supporting Jesus Christ as “the one who fulfills the Old Testament prophecy of the Messiah with the kingdom of heaven being the subject of much of his teachings.”⁹

Although the gospel has sometimes been dated in the 80s or 90s, the fact that the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 is viewed as an event yet future (24:2) seems to require an earlier date. Some feel that this was the first of the Gospels to be written (about A.D. 50), while others think it was not the first and that it was written in the 60s.¹⁰

Audience

Jesus instructed his disciples to meet him in Galilee. “The place was a ‘mountain in Galilee,’ probably the same mountain on which he was transfigured. There they met for privacy, and perhaps to signify the exalted state into which he was entered and is advances toward the upper world.”¹¹ There were doubters among the audience, as indicated by verse seventeen, “But some doubted.” While some sources believe that the doubters were among the eleven, others make the case that this was not so.

The doubters could not have been any of the eleven, for they had seen the Lord more than once in Jerusalem, and had had indubitable proofs that he had risen from the dead, and was no mere spirit or spiritual appearance, but possessed of his former body, with new powers, faculties, and laws. Those who for the moment doubted did not hesitate to acknowledge his resurrection, but his identity. They were, perhaps, at a distance.¹²

Paul also indicated that there were more than eleven people present: The eleven disciples and the host of followers who met Jesus on the mountain that day belonged to a

⁹ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible/English Standard Version* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2011), 1153.

¹⁰ Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible/English Standard Version*, 1153.

¹¹ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. V (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company), 445.

¹² H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, eds., *The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. 15 (Peabody, MA: Henderickson Publishers, 1880), 644.

very distinct group. The Greek word *mathletes*, which we translate as a disciple, means “Those who direct their minds to something; a pupil.”¹³ Kitten also tells us that a unique aspect of New Testament discipleship is that it is a commitment to the person of Jesus. His teaching had power only when there was a complete commitment to his leadership. Being a disciple of Jesus meant being willing to assume the role of servant to a master. Total belief in and obedience to Jesus’s teachings were required of these men. Disciples are simply listeners who ask questions for clarification and for whom the decisive things are not just to appropriate intellectually but to obey.¹⁴

Jesus was well prepared for doubting responses. His profound Great Commission statement indicates how significant this moment was in the lives of his disciples:

Though there were those that doubted, yet, he did not therefore reject them...He came and spoke familiarly with them, as one friend speaks to another, that they might be fully satisfied in the commission he was about to give them. The commission which our Lord Jesus received from the Father. Being about to authorize his apostles, if any ask by what authority he doeth it, and who gave him that authority, here he tells us, ‘All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth’, a very great word, and which none but he could say...AS God, equal with the Father, all power was originally and essentially his; but as Mediator, as God-man, ‘all power was given him’, ...’ in heaven and earth’. Christ is the sole universal monarch, he is the Lord of all. (Acts 10:36)¹⁵

The supporting text of Acts 10:36 states that Jesus offers salvation without partiality to Jews and Gentiles alike. He wants His disciples, both current and future, to know that their brothers and sisters in Christ do not have to come from their same ethnic groups, neighborhoods, or socio-economic statuses.

¹³ Gerard Kitten and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 555.

¹⁴ Kitten and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary*, 560.

¹⁵ Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 445.

What is the principle intention of this commission: to disciple all nations... Christ, the Mediator, is setting up a kingdom in the world, bring the nations to be his subjects; setting up a school, bring the nations to be his scholars; raising an army for the carrying on of the war against the powers of darkness, enlist the nations of the earth under his banner.¹⁶

Furthermore, “The duty of the apostles of Christ, and his ministers; and that is, to ‘teach’ the commands of Christ, to expound them to his disciples, to press upon them the necessity of obedience, and to assist them in applying the general commands of Christ to particular cases.”¹⁷

Here is the assurance he gives them of his spiritual presence with them in the execution of this commission: ‘And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.’... Christ was now sending them to set up his kingdom in the world, which was a great undertaking, and he promises to be with them. They shall have his perpetual presence,’ even unto the end of the world.¹⁸

So, true evangelism is far more than just proclaiming the Gospel; it is making disciples, that is, making followers in doctrine and conduct. “A true disciple is an open worshipper, and obedient worker, and an outspoken witness.”¹⁹

Text/Word Study

Today, we often note that among the ranks of ministers, there are those who could be styled disciples, for they certainly are attached to their pastor/mentor. I have witnessed associate ministers wiping the sweat off the foreheads of their preaching pastors as if they were ancient attendants of an Egyptian pharaoh. This obviously is not what Jesus had in

¹⁶ Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 446.

¹⁷ Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 447.

¹⁸ Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 448.

¹⁹ Watson, *Seek Him Early*, 291.

mind when he said, “make disciples.” Making ‘disciples’ was the sort of things rabbis would do, but Jesus’ followers are to make disciples Jesus, not for themselves. Disciples are made in a twofold way: (1) By baptizing them. Because baptism was an act of conversion (used for Gentiles converting to Judaism), it means initiating people to the faith. (2) By teaching them Jesus’ commandments recorded in Matthew. “We are to make disciples, to attach ourselves to those persons who will follow our Lord until they in turn can make disciples” (2 Tim. 2:2). The relationship of disciple to teacher was one that continued throughout the life of both and even included carrying on the teacher’s traditions after his death.

Context

In this closing pericope, Matthew recapitulates and develops the most important themes of his Gospel (Bauer 1988: 109-28): “because Jesus is the rightful king, his followers must make disciples for him among the nations.”²⁰ Disciple-making was the identifying function of the original disciples of Jesus and remains the main qualifier for one being called a Christian today. Failure to perform this defining duty may indicate an ignorance of or a refusal to do our Christian duty. We must advocate the preparation of the way for the second coming of Jesus Christ and the establishment of His kingdom with the same kind of energy that He and the Twelve exhibited. Though we live in the midst of the delayed *Parousia*, we must enthusiastically pursue immediate disciple-making as the work of the church.

²⁰ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 715.

Although the gospel has sometimes been dated in the 80s or 90s, the fact that the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 is viewed as an event yet future (24:2) seems to require an earlier date. Some feel that this was the first of the Gospels to be written (about A.D. 50), while others think it was not the first and that it was written in the 60s.²¹

Content

This content section compared and contrasted Jesus' power and authority and further discuss and define the keyword discipleship. Much trouble arises in our society when people in authority do not realize that the proper application of power goes hand in hand with authority. The absolute power and authority of Jesus Christ set a much higher standard for the world to emulate.

“Jesus’ power or authority is a given power. It is given by God, and it is given for one reason: to exalt.”²² In issuing the Great Commission, Jesus exalts the training model of teacher and disciples, so common to his ancient world. Matthew 28:19 is one of the most crucial verses in the Bible, for the teacher, for all times to come, giving us the method to evangelize the world. This method is only successful when committed people willingly associate themselves with the very character and behavior of Jesus Christ. He envisioned an extension of Himself, an extension of His very being, and an extension of His mission and method. The way He chose to extend Himself was discipleship, attaching Himself to a committed person, and though, and though attachment, the persons absorbed and assimilated the Lord's very character and mission.²³

²¹ Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible English Standard Version*, 1153.

²² Christian Publisher and Ministries, *The Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible*, 294.

²³ Christian Publisher and Ministries, *The Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible*, 296.

In his book, *What is Great Commission Discipleship*, Dr. Robert Mansfield seeks to define discipleship by, first of all, telling us what discipleship is not. “When defining any vague or unknown term, it is best to eliminate what would not be good definitions first...Let us look at some of the common ‘definitions’ first.”²⁴ “Discipleship is completing a class or a series of classes.” Thus, a disciple is someone who re-teaches these classes. “Discipleship is not taking a class or even regurgitating the material. That can be too mechanical and produce no lifestyle change.”²⁵ “Discipleship is becoming a follower of Jesus Christ.” “This makes discipleship and evangelism the same thing. Discipleship does not automatically occur when we accept Christ. We must move on from there.”²⁶ “If evangelism and discipleship are not the same, where does the former end and the latter begin? Salvation (the act of God by which we become a follower of Jesus) changes the heart (Rom. 10:10). “Becoming a member of the church makes you a disciple of Jesus Christ. The ones bringing in the most members are the best disciplers.”²⁷ Church membership entails being a ‘disciple’ of a local church or a denomination, but it does not make one a disciple of Jesus Christ. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ produces lifestyle changes that do not occur simply because one now has his or her name on a church membership roll. This leads us to a more complete definition of discipleship.

²⁴ Robert Mansfield, *What is Great Commission Discipleship* (Middletown, DE: Evangelistic Discipling, 2024), 7, 8.

²⁵ Mansfield, *What is Great Commission Discipleship*, 8, 9.

²⁶ Mansfield, *What is Great Commission Discipleship*, 9.

²⁷ Mansfield, *What is Great Commission Discipleship*, 12.

Defining the Terms

“Discipleship is the purposeful(intentional) planned advancement of a person from where he/she is spiritually into a deeper walk with God.”²⁸ Another way of saying what discipleship is supposed to be is to say that it is helping others on purpose to develop biblical attitudes, actions, and habits. Jesus is never quoted as saying that we are to be like him. Yet, He does say that if we love Him, we will obey His commands (John 4:15). “Jesus’ commands are not about what we learn academically, but about how we are to live. Living this way (in obedience) is what it means to be Christ-like.”²⁹

Defining the people involved,

We will define the term discipler as someone who intentionally invests his/her life in another for the purpose of helping that person become a true disciple of Jesus Christ and/or into all that God has for them... We disciple on purpose. Our goal is the spiritual growth of those God gives us to disciple, and we work on purpose toward that goal.³⁰

“We will define disciple in this manner: one who is committed to following, and actively and intentionally attempting to follow the will of God (both universal and unique) for their life.”³¹

Analysis of the Argument

Why would the original audience, Jesus’s disciples, embrace this Great Commission? I thought the answer was found in the authority possessed by the

²⁸ Mansfield, *What is Great Commission Discipleship*, 14.

²⁹ Mansfield, *What is Great Commission Discipleship*, 15, 16.

³⁰ Mansfield, *What is Great Commission Discipleship*, 20, 21.

³¹ Mansfield, *What is Great Commission Discipleship*, 22, 23.

proclaimer and his promise to be an ever-present supporter of those who seek to carry out the commission. Buttrick tells us that all authority gives Jesus the privilege of appointment. He says in verse eighteen of our text:

All Authority' means supreme right to appoint to office: thence comes the great commission. It means right to require obedience- because of love poured out unto death, and now triumphant in eternal kingdom. It means right to govern in both earth and heaven. A true faith is not chosen by men: it chooses men... Perhaps it is not 'What would Jesus do?' For we are not Jesus, and cannot presume fully to say or know what he would do. It is rather 'What would Jesus have me do?'...He has the right to command.³²

"The end and aim of the Great Commission is to bring men into the possession and the power of God the Creator, Christ the Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit who is our guide and advocate."³³

Early and Dempsey, in their book *Disciple Making Is... How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence*, discusses the Great Commission as extremely important final instructions, stating that "these final instructions were repeated on three separate occasions and are the only commands of Jesus that are recorded in all four Gospels and the Book of Acts. (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15, Luke 24:46-47; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). It was as if He was telling them, look, I keep repeating this one thing because it is the main thing. If you don't do anything else, be sure and do this."³⁴

Early and Dempsey go on to say that "The Great Commission is not the Great Suggestion-Jesus says in essence-'I have the supreme authority to issue orders.

³² George Arthur Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. VII (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 622.

³³ Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Bible*, 624.

³⁴ David Early, and Rod Dempsey, "Disciple Making Is... How to live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence" (Brentwood, CA: B & H Publishing Group, 2013), 2.

Therefore, take what I am about to say very seriously. 'Since this order to evangelize the world by making disciples was clearly and repeatedly given, it is obvious that it must be obeyed. Since we see both the apostles and non-apostles obeying it, we know that it was given to all of us.³⁵

Preaching is not enough to go; we must also tell. The second practice needed to fulfill the Great Commission is 'evangelism: proclaiming the good news. 'Believers are to 'preach the Good News' with the goal of leading others to believe' (Mark 16:15-16). The result of preaching or proclaiming the gospel should be "to make disciples."³⁶

In conclusion, my research found that the idea of disciple-making in many churches had been replaced by maintenance ministry and meeting community needs, particularly in times of local or national crises. This may have come about from established local church histories that reflect a redefinition not only of what the work of the church is, but also of why the church exists. The scholars write of a time when disciples obeyed their masters, even after the death of their masters, continuing to promote the teaching and legacy of their leader. This promotion was necessary in cultures where great teachers did not produce books to preserve what they had to offer society. Jesus' disciples could be described as "Living epistles," as 2 Corinthians 3:2-4 describes. They used what their master taught them to make disciples, not having the benefit of a written text. The Church must challenge members to put to use the written text and the historical mandate of our Savior to concentrate on the primary responsibility of making disciples.

³⁵ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 3.

³⁶ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 5.

“Training - This involves more than downloading information. Disciple making is about comprehensive training in obedience leading to reproduction and multiplication.”³⁷

Early and Dempsey concluded that fulfilling the Great Commission results in church planting, both locally and globally. The case was made to include discipleship training in existing local churches, with the intention to do so through my doctoral project. While this reference book emphasizes the nature and ultimate result of Great Commission fulfillment being that of new church startups, the case was made that existing churches were equipped to understand better and apply disciple-making strategies.

Disciple-making strategies should emphasize that we cannot omit or leave out any portion of the Great Commission in our training of members to evangelize, as the text calls us to observe everything that Jesus taught. This means lifestyle obedience, too. We must live and act as Jesus would have us to in order to make a disciple. As the expression goes, *we must walk the walk and talk the talk*. Accomplishing this is only possible with the Lord being our helper. The Bible supports this viewpoint in Mark 10: 26-27 (NRSV), when Jesus responds to his disciples' question about who can be saved, because of the apparent difficulty of the process, with this statement. “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

We celebrate the fact that the Great Commission contains a great promise. The authors go on to say, “do not miss the fact that Jesus promised to be with us as we make disciples. God’s heart is, in a special way, with those who fulfill His command to make disciples. He shows up when we step up to fulfill His commission.”³⁸ Let’s note the

³⁷ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 5.

³⁸ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 7.

importance of obeying everything Jesus Commanded: “The Great Omission in the Great Commission - Jesus’s final command was “Teach them to observe all my commandments” (Matt. 28:20). Jesus commanded all his disciples to teach everyone in the world to obey all His commands. Therefore, we cannot say that we are fulfilling the Great Commission until we are teaching our disciples to “observe everything Jesus commanded.’ The failure to teach it all and obey it all is the Great Omission in the Great Commission.³⁹

The Great Assumption in the Great Commission - ‘In demanding them to make disciples, He was assuming they were already living as disciples. In commanding them to obey everything he had demanded; he was assuming they were already obeying everything He had commanded. Therefore, before you can make a disciple, you need to be a disciple. Before you can be a disciple, you need to begin obeying everything Jesus commanded.⁴⁰

Disciples Obey Jesus’ Commands -The word ‘disciple’ means student or learner. It describes a protégé who learns and follows his teacher’s precepts and instructions. It speaks of a follower who adopts the lifestyle of his master. In the first century, a disciple-making relationship was based on intimacy and obedience. No wonder Jesus said, ‘If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. (John 14:15).⁴¹

Speaking of those things ‘demanded by the Gospels’ may cause some discomfort. We need to be very clear about something: God demands absolute obedience to His commands. Consider the following words of Jesus: ‘Not everyone who says to Me,’ Lord, Lord!’ Will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of My Father in heaven.’⁴² (Matt. 7:21).

Dr. Robert E. Coleman, in his book *The Master Plan of Evangelism*: “Jesus saw to it that his disciples learned his way of living with God and man. He recognized that it

³⁹ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 48.

⁴⁰ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 49.

⁴¹ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 49.

⁴² Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 51.

was not enough just to get people into his spiritual communion. His disciples needed to know how his experience was to be maintained and shared if it was to be perpetuated in evangelism...He knew what was important.”⁴³

His Practice of Prayer - “Take, for example, his prayer life. Surely it was no accident that Jesus often let his disciples see him conversing with the Father. They could see the strength that it gave to his life, and though they could not understand fully what it was all about, they must have realized that this was part of his secret of life.”⁴⁴

Another aspect of Jesus’s life that was vividly portrayed to the disciples was the importance and use of the holy Scriptures....Often he would take special pains to impress on his followers the meaning of some passage of Scripture, and he never ceased to use the Scriptures in his conversation with them. Altogether there are at least sixty-six references to the Old Testament in his dialogues with the disciples in the four Gospels, to say nothing on the more than ninety allusions to it in his speaking with others. All this served to show the disciples how they, too, should know and use the Scriptures in their own life...Moreover, the ability of Jesus to recall so freely Old Testament passages must have impressed the disciples with the necessity of learning the Scriptures by heart, and letting them become the authority of their pronouncements.⁴⁵

Practically everything that Jesus said and did had some relevance to their work of evangelism, either by explaining a spiritual truth or revealing to them how they should deal with people. He did not have to work up teaching situations, but merely took advantage of those about him, and thus his teaching seemed perfectly realistic. In fact, for the most part, the disciples were absorbing it without even knowing that they were being trained to win people under like conditions for God.⁴⁶

“When it is all boiled down, those of us who are seeking to train people must be prepared to have them follow us, even as we follow Christ (1 Cor. 11:1) We are the exhibit (Phil.

⁴³ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 71.

⁴⁴ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 72.

⁴⁵ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 73, 74.

⁴⁶ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 74.

3:17; 1 Thess. 2:7,8; 2 Tim. 1:13). They will do those things that they hear and see in us (Phil. 4:9).⁴⁷

Kenneth S. Wuest, in his book *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation*, offers us a new reading of our text, bringing further clarity to its important message. He renders Matthew 28:16-20 thusly-

Now, the eleven disciples went on their way to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And having seen Him, they worshipped Him. But some doubted. And Jesus, having come, spoke to them, saying, 'There was given to me all authority in heaven and upon earth. Having gone on your way therefore, teach all the nations, making them your pupils, baptizing them into the Name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to be attending to carefully, holding firmly to, and observing all, whatever things I enjoined upon you. And behold, as for myself, With you I am all the days until the consummation of the age.'⁴⁸

Summary

In summarizing the work of this chapter, we began by restating the introduction, theme, and hypothesis statements, which address the problem statement of my Doctor of Ministry project. As indicated in the analysis of the argument section, it was crucial for local churches to improve their thinking of and application of the disciple-making process.

Upon being assigned to the pastorate of Ardis Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, a historic church in my home district, this pastor found many people known for years. After looking closely at the church's organizational plan and observing the attendance patterns of members and their extended families, it was realized that the maintenance ministry

⁴⁷ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 77.

⁴⁸ Wuest, *The New Testament*, 78.

could easily describe the yearly routine at Ardis Chapel. Prayerfully considering scriptural support for my anticipated doctoral project's focus on evangelism as the primary focus of the church led to Matthew 28:19-20. It is of the utmost importance for the survival of this church and the understanding of the individual work of every member that the focus and the agenda going forward would change, prioritizing making disciples, not performing the tasks of "yearly church work!" If disciples are made, if current members embrace the return to the church's Great Commission, the work of the church will be done.

The sole priority of the church's existence is to spread the gospel and lead souls to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. All other activities of the church and its members are secondary to this sole priority and ought to draw their existence from the primary work Jesus gave us to do.

The biblical foundation for this hypothesis is the examination and application of Matthew 28:19-20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." The examination will also provide the pericope's literary, historical, and social context in relation to the supporting chapters preceding Matthew 28:19-20.

Mark Denver agrees that church plants and existing local churches must disciple. "... Jesus tells his disciples to make disciples. Grammatically, this is the one imperative verb in the original Greek: make disciples. And that command is surrounded by three participles, so that we could translate the verbal phrases like this: 'Going, make disciples, baptizing and teaching'" (Matt. 28:19, 20). If making disciples depends on going,

baptizing, and teaching, who sends the goers? Who is doing the baptizing and teaching? Is this work accomplished primarily through individual evangelizing and discipline? Or some other way? "...the Great Commission is normally fulfilled through planting and growing local churches."⁴⁹

This commission is for us!" "And it's not just for us as individual Christians. It is for us as churches and church members...So think once more of the four commands of the Great Commission: go, make disciples, baptize, and teach? Who does all this? The local church. The local church is the normal means God has given us to fulfill the Great Commission."⁵⁰

"The point is, in the New Testament, the Christian life is the church life. Our discipleship to Christ occurs in and through churches."⁵¹

Dr. Wanda Bolton-Davis gives us a fine summary statement of our text and application.

Upon meeting the disciples in Galilee, Jesus makes an exceptional claim and gives the disciples an imperative assignment. He first claims all authority, rule, dominion, and jurisdiction, by stating that 'all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'(Matt.28:18b). Then He charges the disciples to 'go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of Holy Spirit'⁹ (Matt. 28:19a) It is because Jesus has plenary authority and can delegate power to whomever He wills that He confers the commission. "This commission was not only for the disciples of Jesus' day, but for every future disciple of Jesus as well...The assignment of making the gospel known to the world is a task given to every believer."⁵²

In addition, Jesus' mandate to the disciples was to teach. The Great Commission adds that believer should be 'teaching them (new Christians) to obey everything I have commanded you'(Mt.28:20a) These verses imply more than conversion alone; Jesus instructed the disciples to teach His followers to obey. This involved giving instruction according to the whole counsel of God's word so that followers of Jesus Christ might learn to live a life in obedience to his

⁴⁹ Mark Denver, *Understanding the Great Commission* (Nashville, TN: B and H Publishing Group, 2016), 2.

⁵⁰ Denver, *Understanding the Great Commission*, 3, 4, and 5.

⁵¹ Denver, *Understanding the Great Commission*, 22.

⁵² Wanda Bolton-Davis, *Returning to the Great Commission: Examining the Biblical Foundation and Effectiveness of Small Groups Discipleship* (Lee's Summit, MO: E 3 Kingdom Leaders, 2020), 26.

word.’...”Along with the assignment that was now placed on the disciple’s lives, Jesus provided the promise of His everlasting presence. Jesus said, ‘And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’(Mt. 28:20b). This promise has no expiration date-‘until the end of the age’-and therefore, Jesus remains with every disciple today.⁵³

Buehrung has begun to see the Great Commission of Jesus as an opportunity to ‘co-mission with Jesus, to be on a mission with Him. “This is accomplished by what the author and his team call ‘Vocational Disciple Making.’ Vocational disciple making is developing disciples of Jesus who reflect His character, walk in his ways, and participate in His mission, in and through their vocation.”⁵⁴ “First, vocational disciple making is about deliberately ‘developing’ disciples of Jesus. Growth, maturity, and the ability to pass spiritual truths on to others does not happen accidentally...It requires purposeful intentionality to develop someone as a disciple.”⁵⁵

This summary concludes with Buehrung’s three specific areas of our deliberate discipling:

1. Reflecting His Character - “Many people have a very difficult time seeing who Jesus is and what He is really like. You and I have the distinct privilege of showing them more personally what he is like as we reflect His kindness, faithfulness, integrity, grace, truth, hard work, justice, forgiveness, hope, compassion, etc. through our vocational role.
2. Walking in His Ways-“His ways are ‘how he does things. ‘Within our vocations, does how we relate, forgive, honor, and serve people reflect Jesus? Do you humbly (and quietly) apply the ways of Jesus in and through your job?
3. Participating in His Mission-“...How does He express His care of those you work with through you? Do you ‘go to work’ each day referencing hoe Jesus may want to better and bless the lives of others through your life?⁵⁶

⁵³ Bolton-Davis, *Returning to the Great Commission*, 27.

⁵⁴ Buehrung, *The Great Opportunity*, 13.

⁵⁵ Buehrung, *The Great Opportunity*, 13, 14.

⁵⁶ Beuhrung, *The Great Opportunity*, 15.

“How differently might the world look if the godly parent, educator, artist/musician, athlete, news anchor, techie, farmer, disaster relief worker, and cause-driven activist carried with them the character, ways, and mission of Jesus!”⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Beuhrung, *The Great Opportunity*, 15.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Chapter three was the historical reflection on John Wesley, the history of the Methodist Movement provides a model for understanding how intentional discipleship can transform congregational norms. The ministry of John Wesley offers a historical example of how structured spiritual formation can reshape individual lives and expectations. The goal of this project addressed the problem that the members of Ardis Chapel A. M. E. Zion Church are actively making disciples within the surrounding community.

As one considers the personal journey in ministry, how one grows into the one God has called you to be, we can be challenged by our failings and shortcomings. A self-assessment, from time to time, may cause us to question decisions made; the ‘what ifs’ that make us wonder how different things might be if we had answered the call at a younger age or gone to a different seminary or pastored different churches. The purpose of this chapter is to examine some of the pivotal moments in the life of one that looms large in the annals of Church History, Reverend John Wesley, especially how these moments impacted the Methodist Movement's creation and our local church's culture. His life was one of major shifts and ups and downs, of doing things completely out of the ordinary, as far as the established Anglican Church’s reaction indicates. Yet, as we

examine these pivotal moments, especially the first few, we can see that John Wesley was a product of his environment, perhaps more strongly influenced by his upbringing than one today would rather experience. We will see movement from one school of thought to another as he journeys toward the peace of knowing the assurance of salvation and knowing that he is on the right course as a minister. Wesley was a “work in progress,” one whose life experiences led him through doubts, fears, reversals, and even thoughts of leaving the ministry until he reached a time of peace and satisfaction with the fact of his salvation.

This chapter looked at Wesley’s educational process, from homeschooling to the highest levels of clerical education possible in eighteenth-century England. When compared to the modern use of the term homeschooling, for the Wesley children, it meant meeting a standard of education and obedience to parental authority. In today’s society, the standard would cause many children to rebel. It was the standard set by his mother, Susanna Wesley, that launched John to levels of achievement hard to match today, where it is a rarity to see one so young advance so greatly while still being taught from home. We also saw the beginnings of some foundational components of Methodism that are part of the daily life of a select group of students John will lead.

This chapter examined some of John Wesley’s challenges as a missionary in Georgia, where personal relationships and impractical pastoral expectations caused him severe problems that would make him question if he was called to preach the gospel. Hope and encouragement came to him from quite unexpected quarters as Wesley learned from the Moravians how to answer an important question about the Christian life. This contact eventually leads John to major changes in how he carries out his call and causes

him to lead a growing movement that becomes a new denominational category. Wesley did not seek to reform the Church of England but rather promote authentic Christian living among its members through small-group discipleship.

Several pivotal moments in John Wesley's life were selected, highlighted in the chapter's main body, followed by the summary. Also included was the source material and my comments and thoughts. This chapter sought aspects of my ministry journey that may parallel or compare to those of John Wesley and sought to gain inspiration and encouragement as my journey continues.

Pivotal Moments

First, the importance of early childhood education is a big factor in the educational process in modern-day America, where children begin their formal public school education in kindergarten at five years of age. This was not the norm in eighteenth-century England, where some children were offered education by their parents, while others were not educated and were forced to work.

The Wesley children were taught at home by their mother, Susanna Wesley. From his fifth birthday, John began his lessons. His mother considered one day a week sufficient for her children to learn the alphabet, and by age ten, she expected all her children, both girls and boys, to be able to read and write in Greek, the language of Biblical study. Susanna gave each of her children one day a week when she spent time alone with them, teaching them about the love of God. Thursday was John's day.¹

Susanna Wesley not only taught her children spiritual discipline but also physical discipline and restraint. For example, she trained her children to refuse food between meals, and John's characteristic and polite reply to all kindly offers was, 'I thank you; I will think of it.' This discipline Susanna taught her children was of

¹ Robert Poulter, *The John Wesley Story* (London, UK: Foundry Press, 1987), 3.

great value years later when Wesley was traveling many miles on horseback to evangelistic meetings.²

Stanley Ayling further elaborates on Mrs. Wesley's teaching method with this quote from her:

Our children were taught, as soon as they could speak, the lord's prayer, which they were made to say at rising and bedtime constantly; to which, as they grew bigger, were added a short prayer for their parents, and some collects, a short catechism, and some portion of Scripture, as their memories could bear. They were very early made to distinguish the Sabbath from other days... There was no such thing as loud talking or playing allowed, but everyone was kept close to business for the six hours of school. And it is almost incredible what a child may be taught in a quarter of a year by vigorous application... Rising out of their places, or going out of a room, was not permitted, except for a good cause; and running into the yard, garden or street, without leave, was always esteemed a capital offense.³

Susanna used memory drills, repeating lesson thoughts over and over again with John, much more than her husband thought necessary. Once he asked why she did so, and she replied "nineteen times were not sufficient. If I had stopped after telling him nineteen times, all my labor would have been lost."⁴ John led a structured, ordered life from his childhood. Discipline was a factor in his view of the Christian life. It played a major role in what he expected of those who joined the societies of early Methodism. Perhaps a reconsideration of "how we do, what we do" is in order in the church, how we see our priorities. Our number one priority is to make disciples, which is the focus of the doctoral project.

² Ray Comfort, *Wesley Gold* (Orlando, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2007), 4.

³ Stanley Ayling, *John Wesley* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 22-23.

⁴ Comfort, *Wesley Gold*, 4.

As a result of the strict and unpopular pastoral practices of his father Samuel Wesley, a fire was set in the parsonage that almost took John's life. His mother, Susanna, said of his rescue, "Is this not a brand plucked out of the burning?" She believed that John's rescue was a part of God's plan for his life. Is it not possible that there are other "brands," waiting to be plucked out of the "fires" of this earthly life, other people that God will use to his glory, only if the church comes to their rescue?

John left his homeschooling at an early age, only to enter higher education and find that he was uncertain about where he stood as a Christian. When we get away from the safety of home, our thoughts may turn to spiritual matters because our support system has changed. The college life of order and study appealed to John. It helped him reach out to others who had similar interests. It also helped John embrace the life of a minister. His mother again was his chief encourager. When we need the support and encouragement of others mature in the faith to make the important decisions of life, especially those that concern our service to the Lord.

John's efforts to reach out to like-minded individuals at school led to regular meetings to plan the Christian way of life, such as doing charitable works, visiting prisoners, helping the poor, and other things. What are the results of our class meetings? Why do we meet in the first place? The benefits of John Wesley's early education brought an appreciation for discipline, order, and learning that would play major roles in the man he became and the ministry he led. At times, his orderly lifestyle proved a challenge to those he shared the faith with, even leading to people thinking John was too demanding in what he expected of his followers.

Memorable events in childhood can remind us, as adults, how special we are to God and the work he is calling us to do. For example, I have memories of joyful experiences as a child of being in church and feeling as though I belonged to and needed to be there. Looking back over my life and understanding the importance of disciple-making brought joy in looking at such pivotal moments. Memories of being a youth in the church and having to be involved with catechism that was very structured, helped me learn to recite scriptures and discuss them. These moments are not always pleasant experiences. They may even be dangerous, at the time, but thanks be to God for his protection. Such a moment occurred in John Wesley's life.

On Wednesday, February 9, 1709, in response to the unpopular and strict practices of Samuel Wesley (John's father) among his church members, a fire was set at night, while the household, except Samuel, lay fast asleep. All reached safety, except John, who was missing. John's rescue was affected by neighbors, from a window in the house. Susanna said of this, thinking that God must have rescued her son for some special purpose- 'Is this not a brand plucked out of the burning?' This remark meant much to John later in life.⁵

Wesley had a picture of himself made in front of that burning house, with the same words his mother quoted from Zechariah 3:2. He and his mother saw this pivotal moment as an indication that God rescued him, plucked him out of the fire to keep for great future work. Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?

Consider our twenty-first-century world. Is not Zechariah 3:2 an apt description of certain people reported in the news? We have read about babies who were blessed to survive life-threatening medical situations; children delivered from abusive households and those who practice criminal lifestyles; adults wrongly imprisoned, blessed to be released after surviving the prison experience and other adults who survived the horrors

⁵ Poulter, *The John Wesley Story*, 8.

of war, either in the military or as civilians. What if God had a purpose, a plan, a reason for these rescues? How might the rescued respond when they hear the message of salvation? As we seek to spread the good news, may we not overlook “brands plucked from the fire.”

In 1713, when John reached age ten, his parents realized he had outgrown homeschooling and needed school education. He entered Charterhouse in London, where he soon showed himself to be a leader. “Whilst at Charterhouse, John showed early signs of the magnetic personality that later would hold the attention of vast crowds. A master was surprised to find their playground empty one break time. He searched the school until he found all the boys gathered around the future preacher who was entertaining them with Instructive Tales.⁶

John Wesley continued to be a very gifted student, with both the church and the world as points of interest. His behavior for the next few years in school was very conservative and religiously oriented. His focus was reading the bible, going to church, and praying. John’s interaction with his classmates were interesting and showed signs of his natural leadership ability. His experiences in higher education reflect an uncomfortableness with how he was raised and new options in behavior that reflect the campus life in the big city. He sees himself as doing things that are sinful while still doing godly things. The challenge is one of being in the world and not of the world, of refusing to follow the world value system and following the word of Christ in our words and actions. When I was an undergraduate student at Barber-Scotia College, I experienced the situation of being a “Church girl,” and being tempted to live as though I was not. Even though it appeared like everyone was doing it, I felt convicted when I joined the crowd. In many respects, my personal and church family back home could be

⁶ Poulter, *The John Wesley Story*, 9.

compared to that of John Wesley as a young college student. Being at peace with the world and the church options was a challenge, but I endured with determination.

John Wesley saw the importance of mentoring and disciplining his colleagues, to help them and to help himself grow in ways pleasing to God.

In 1720, John started university life at Christ Church College, Oxford. Trained to be disciplined from his earliest childhood, he applied himself to his studies, concentrating on theology and training to be a clergyman like his father. Years later, on March 28, 1726, John was elected a Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford. This post gave him certain teaching duties and a salary. This suited John well, for he enjoyed the time to study. John soon gathered around him a group of like-minded college people with whom he could share his religious ideals.⁷

In 1725, when he was twenty-two, John came to a turning point in his life as he faced the question of what he should do with his future life. The prospect of becoming a minister was his most serious consideration, but he realized that he was spiritually unfit for the work of the ministry....the spiritual fire that had burned high in him when he first came to Christ Church was now a flickering flame.⁸

His father cautioned John to wait to enter the ministry so that he would not be a callow [young and inexperienced] clergyman.’ His parents did not agree with John’s readiness for the Christian ministry. Perhaps his mother’s years of schooling and encouragement helped her to have a different viewpoint as to what John’s future should be. She wrote John, in reference to his father’s opinion saying, “Mr. Wesley differs from me and would engage you, I believe, in critical learning, which, though incidentally of use, is no wise preferable to the other (practically divinity).”⁹

“On Sunday, September 19, 1725, John Wesley was ordained deacon by John Potter, Bishop of Oxford, in Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, and ordained a priest on

⁷ Poulter, *The John Wesley Story*, 11.

⁸ Comfort, *Wesley Gold*, 10.

⁹ Comfort, *Wesley Gold*, 12.

September 22, 1728. His first sermon was preached at South Leigh, in Oxfordshire, in 1725.”¹⁰

John’s father was sixty-five years old and in poor health. To continue to earn the small living from Wroote and Epworth, he needed a curate- A Rector’s assistant. John had been offered a school in Yorkshire; he would be the headmaster and only teacher. It paid a good salary, and it was secluded; both things attracted him. But his mother saw that God had better things for him in the future, and taking her advice as always, he turned down the offer. Instead, he went to Lincolnshire and worked as his father’s curate for two and a quarter year, occasionally returning to Oxford. This was the only experience he ever had in pastoring a church.¹¹

The religious fellowship that John had in mind for his classmates at Oxford was not one only of a gathering to study the Bible. He had in mind expressing their faith through community-oriented ministry, much like we desire to see our churches do. On February 14, 1727, John Wesley was granted his Master of Arts Degree and was ordained priest by the Bishop of Oxford. His younger brother Charles went up to Oxford, too.

By 1729 they had gathered around them a small group of followers who met regularly together to study the Bible and the classical writings of the Church. They aspired to follow a Christian way of life by doing charitable work, visiting prisoners, helping poor families, and running a small school. John emerged as the natural leader of this band, which was subject to the ridicule of their fellow students with names like “‘Bible Bigots,’ ‘The Bible Moths,’ ‘The Enthusiasts’ and ‘The Holy Club.’”¹²

John and his college classmates continued discipline lifestyle that characterized holy club and early Methodism. The rules they lived by included keeping a daily schedule for studying, sleeping and eating and examining one another. “The precision

¹⁰ Comfort, *Wesley Gold*, 15, 16.

¹¹ Comfort, *Wesley Gold*, 16.

¹² Poulter, *The John Wesley Story*, 15.

with which they regulated their lives their lives caused one young man to say, ‘a new set of Methodist have sprung up’”¹³ “To be a Methodist required commitment. You could come to the open Society meetings and listen to a sermon as often as you like, but as soon as you decided to join the Society, you were from that point on an active participant, most likely advancing to leadership responsibilities.”¹⁴

This led the young Wesley to begin seeking out opportunities to earn God’s grace and ‘perfect love’ through acts of mercy and service to/with others...he eventually relinquished his Epworth work and returned to Oxford to pursue holiness through his religious studies. There, in keeping with his desire to do good deeds, he joined and eventually became leader of a religious society dedicated to personal devotion and service to the poor, initially begun by his brother Charles and other Oxford students, called the ‘Holy Club’. Wesley created a structure for the Holy Club’s methods and habits of prayer, discussion, and social work to give discipline to their devotional and service time.¹⁵

John Wesley was introduced to the wider church world and its culture when he accepted an unusual invitation.

John was invited by General James Edward Oglethorpe to travel to America and become the pastor of the Georgian colony. His brother Charles was also offered a job as secretary for the General. The brothers set sail for America on October 14, 1735, when John was 35 years old. While the Weasleys continued their strict way of life among the passengers aboard the ship, they became very impressed with Moravians also traveling with them. “This religious sect from Germany were humble and forgiving, even when they took on all the lowest jobs which the English refused to do, never getting any thanks

¹³ Comfort, *Wesley Gold*, 17.

¹⁴ Nickel, *Groaning After Full Redemption*, 80.

¹⁵ Brian E. Germano, *Christianity the Wesleyan Way: Principles and Practices for Life and Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Wesley’s Foundry Books, 2020), 22, 23.

for their selflessness.”¹⁶ In a severe storm, the English settlers screamed and were terrified, while the Moravians remained calm, even singing psalms. John and Charles decided to learn German so that they might learn more from the Moravians. Soon after settling in Savannah, Georgia, John was asked some challenging questions by Augustus Gottlieb Spangenberg, one of the Moravian preachers.

‘Do you know Jesus Christ?’ John was not sure how to answer, but he finally said, ‘I know he is the savior of the world.’ Spangenberg said, ‘True, but do you know he has saved you?’ John was taken aback and replied that he did believe Jesus had saved him; but he knew in his heart, that this was not true.¹⁷

Once he arrived in Savannah, John proceeded to lead his new church under what would be to us modern Christians in a very demanding way. One authority described it saying, “to be accepted as serious, that is as a communicant, his flock were expected regularly to attend his morning service, usually at five, though sometimes at six or as late as eight o’clock.”¹⁸

John’s experience with his church family in Georgia would prove to be a time of testing and self-examination. In many ways, it could have contributed to his feeling of uncertainty about his salvation and calling to the ministry.

John’s time in the Georgia colony was marked by several occasions where the settlers and their pastor disagreed on how he led their church. His behavior was puzzling to the community, with people questioning his manner of religion and his lifestyle, which was open to sharing across cultural lines. He spent time with Germans, began to learn Spanish, and even taught French. But it was the management of his personal life that brought about his most serious problem in Georgia. One such event even involved a failed love relationship that developed with a young lady, Sophie Hopkey, a member of

¹⁶ Poulter, *The John Wesley Story*, 22.

¹⁷ Poulter, *The John Wesley Story*, 27.

¹⁸ Ayling, *John Wesley*, 67, 68.

the church. After waiting a year for John to make up his mind about marriage, Sophie married another settler. John's response to her decision included refusing to give her communion one Sunday.

"He took the extreme step, exercising his priestly rights, of turning her away when she attended for Communion...The next day a warrant was issued for 'the body of John Wesley, clerk, to be brought to court to answer charges made by Sophie Williamson and her husband that he had defamed her character and denied her the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in a public congregation.'"¹⁹ Under the threat of legal action on behalf of Sophie and her husband, John realized it was time to go home. He later wrote in his diary of this time in Georgia "I went to America to convert the Indians, but oh! Who shall convert me."²⁰ John returned to England on February 1, 1738, a despondent man. He knew he lacked the faith that had so impressed him in the Moravians. Peter Bohler, a Moravian preacher, had told him to "Preach faith until you have it, and then, because you have it...you will preach faith."²¹ Wesley began to preach in churches of London, declaring 'The Love of God to All,' a message that did not go well with the local clergymen. He was eventually told, 'Sir, you must not preach here no more.'²² This reaction was an indication of the preaching and teaching content of the ministers in the Church of England and how Wesley and other Methodist ministries were seen as a challenge to them.

¹⁹ Ayling, *John Wesley*, 83.

²⁰ Poulter, *The John Wesley Story*, 32.

²¹ Poulter, *The John Wesley Story*, 32.

²² Poulter, *The John Wesley Story*, 34.

One of the characteristics of John Wesley's personality that we should be honest about with those we would disciple is his uncertainty about his assurance of salvation. Mature Christians may also have such struggles today or be faced with similar reactions from those they seek to disciple. "On the morning of May 24, 1738, John came on these words in the Bible: 'Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.' He wrote in his journal, "In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street." There, during a meeting at about a quarter to nine, John experienced his 'conversion.' He was sure his sins had been forgiven. This was the great turning point in John's life. After much prayer, he stood and proclaimed to the congregation how he felt in his heart. In the evening of that same day, John went to a worship service in a society on Aldersgate Street, where something powerful happened, in response to hearing Luther's preference to the book of Romans. John recorded it in his journal, saying, "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ-Christ alone for my salvation; and an assurance was given to me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin & death."²³ This moving experience prompted changes in the way Wesley practiced ministry, changes that would eventually characterize the Methodist Movement.

When the educated clergy and sophisticated Anglican laity would not listen, Wesley took his message of personal faith in Christ to the poor of Britain's slums, factories, and coal mines. "On Monday, April 2, 1739, John preached his first sermon in the open air. Standing on a small mound in the brickfields outside Bristol, he spoke to a crowd about three thousand people. This was the start of his open air ministry."²⁴ Since

²³ Germano, *Christianity the Wesleyan Way*, 27.

²⁴ Poulter, *The John Wesley Story*, 42.

Wesley had no congregation or parish of his own, in June 1739 he famously wrote in his Journal, “I look upon all the world as my parish.”²⁵ This form of evangelism became known as field preaching. In 1741, John began the ministry of traveling and preaching the length and breadth of the British Isles that would occupy him for the rest of his life.

John did most of his traveling on horseback, and having little time to spare...on his preaching tours, he often read a book as he rode along. In his old age, John remembered how seldom his horses had fallen or stumbled, despite his habit of reading as he rode...Having ridden well over 100,000 miles, he could remember only two horses that had fallen, and stated that, ‘A slack rein will prevent stumbling if anything will, but in some horses, nothing can.’²⁶

Wesley’s experiences on the road were a combination of spiritual and physical ups and downs as he encountered being received with joy and or being exposed to seen and unseen. For example, during his travels in 1741, he had mob attacks, riding accidents, and the enriching experience of ministering in a school he founded and several centers of Methodist growth.

Despite all his traveling and preaching, John Wesley still found time to write and publish many books and pamphlets. Their subject matter ranged from books of sermons, prayers, psalms, and hymns to the history of England. Wesley writes of distinguishing marks that are features of a good foundation of a Methodist, saying that a Methodist “loves God, joyous in God, gives thanks, prays consistently and loves others.”²⁷

One of the areas Wesley was highly interested in was Christian perfection. He seems to have been interested in this subject from his days of being uncertain about his

²⁵ Germano, *Christianity the Wesleyan Way*, 29.

²⁶ Poulter, *The John Wesley Story*, 75.

²⁷ Steve Harper, *Five Marks of Methodist: The Fruit of a Living Faith* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015), vii-ix.

salvation and the possibility that one could be half a Christian. His further reading of Christian scholars and the holy Bible led Wesley to conclude the Christian life centered around “the indispensable necessity of having the mind which was in Christ, and of walking as Christ also walked...”²⁸ In a sermon from 1741, he says:

Christian perfection therefore does not imply (as some men seem to have imagined) an exemption either from ignorance or mistake, or infirmities or temptations. Indeed, it is only another term for holiness. They are two names for the same thing. Thus everyone that is perfect is holy, and everyone that is holy is, in the Scripture sense, perfect. Yet we may, lastly, observe that neither in this respect is there any absolute perfection on earth. There is no ‘perfection of degrees’, as it is termed; none which does not admit of a continual increase. So that how much so ever any man hath attained, or in how high a degree so ever he is perfect, he hath still need to ‘grow in grace’, and daily to advance in the knowledge and love of God his Savior.²⁹

John Wesley also sought to clearly define the phrase “means of grace.” In a sermon by the same title, we see this excerpt:

By *means of grace* I understand outward signs, word, or action ordained of God and appointed for this end: to be the ordinary channels by which He might convey to individuals either preventing, justifying or sanctifying grace... The chief of these means are prayer (whether in secret or with congregation); searching the scriptures (which implies reading, hearing, and meditating on them); and receiving the Lord’s Supper... And these we believe to be ordained of God as the ordinary channels of conveying His grace to the souls of individuals.³⁰

This important area of understanding in our A. M. E. Zion churches needs clarification because many of us do not know what we should consider means of grace. Wesley also wrote about health matters in his series of books.

²⁸ Frank Whaling, *John and Charles Wesley Selected Writing and Hymns* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981), 299.

²⁹ Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater, *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 73.

³⁰ Alice Russie, ed., *The Essential Works of John Wesley: Selected Books, Sermons, and Other Writings* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Publishing, Inc., 2011), 191.

Other titles included 'Primitive Physic,' a book of homely remedies to cure a wide range of illnesses, and a pamphlet on electricity. John believed electricity had good healing properties and even bought a machine which produced electric shocks that he used on himself and others. He was interested not only in the well-being of people's souls but the health of their bodies too.³¹

In his sixty-third year he would speak of himself being relatively good health, with "no disorder, no weakness, no decay, no different what I was at five-and -twenty; only that I have fewer teeth and more gray hairs."³² Even though John Wesley had a diverse interest in the books he wrote, he emphasized the need to be a student of the Bible. He writes in his book, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*:

In the year 1729, I began not only to read, but to study, the Bible, as the one, the only standard of truth, and the only model of pure religion. Hence, I saw, in a clearer and clearer light, the indispensable necessity of having the mind, which was in Christ, and of walking as Christ also walked; even of having, not some part only, but all the mind which was in him; and of walking as he walked, not only in many or in most respects but in all things. And this was the light, wherein at this time I generally considered religion, as a uniform following of Christ, an entire inward and outward conformity to our Master. Nor was I afraid of anything more than of bending this rule to the experience of myself, or of other men; of allowing myself in any the least disconformity to our grand Exemplar.³³

"Like all new religious movements, Wesley and the early Methodists faced their share of controversy within the British society. Yet, in spite of it all and (perhaps even because of it), Methodism spread and flourished."³⁴

John Wesley had insisted that all Methodists should remain members of the Church of England. But many wished to establish their own separate church. John was against this until the American colonies declared their independence in 1776 when they no longer accepted the authority of the Church of England. Until then, only ordained clergy in the Church of England had been allowed to officiate at the

³¹ Poulter, *The John Wesley Story*, 75.

³² Comfort, *Wesley Gold*, 154.

³³ John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 7.

³⁴ Germano, *Christianity the Wesleyan Way*, 40, 41.

Communion Service and only Bishops had been allowed to ordain the clergy. When the American Methodists asked John if he would ordain ministers for them in America, he had a difficult decision to make. He knew that if he ordained these ministers, it would mean breaking away from the Church of England.³⁵

Early Methodists were looked upon as ‘disturbers of the world,’ the new Levellers, and were thus victims of surviving memories of the English Civil Wars when antecedent forms of popular religious enthusiasm led, or so it was thought, to the collapse of political, religious, and social stability. In its new Methodist guise religious enthusiasm appeared to undermine traditional authority by criticizing the vices of social superiors and the worldliness of the parish clergy. The Methodist propensity to use itinerant lay, and female preachers crossed traditional social boundaries of hierarchy, law, gender, age, wealth, education, and religious vocation. Moreover, Methodism’s unregulated nationwide organization cut across the parish, diocesan, and county borders upon which English local government and the administration of the law depended. This lack of official control was exacerbated by the fact that Methodism often took strongest root in marginal areas, scattered entitlements, and new industrial and mining environments where the traditional social cement was weakest.³⁶

“After much thought and anguish, he agreed to the American request and ordained Dr. Thomas Coke as Superintendent of the Societies in America, in September 1784.”³⁷

If one could summarize Wesley’s thinking about a person’s status on earth, with or without salvation, he found the average person in a rather sad lot. He once said, “Wherever I have been, I have found the bulk of mankind, Christian, as well as heathen, deplorably ignorant, vicious, and miserable...sin and pain are on every side.”³⁸ Such a statement, in and of itself, would not be a rallying cry to call sinners to repentance and to challenge those who are being saved to continue to fight the good fight. Wesley’s own personal struggles with salvation thinking and Christian perfection while developing the

³⁵ Poulter, *The John Wesley Story*, 80.

³⁶ David Hampton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 87.

³⁷ Poulter, *The John Wesley Story*, 80.

³⁸ Ayling, *John Wesley*, 311.

characteristics of Methodism led him to conclude that there is hope in the Lord. He would say, “none need perish, for we have an almighty Savior.”³⁹ Both Wesley, the founder, and Methodism, the faith experience, were crafted in the midst of uncertainty and opposition. God gets the glory for the end results.

In short, Methodism experienced enough episodic opposition from below to persuade its loyal supporters that the Lord’s work was costly and the ‘devil’s’ hostility inevitable, but not enough sustained opposition from above to threaten the viability of the whole enterprise. Opposition was as much an enabler as it was a destroyer of the Methodist cause.⁴⁰

Conclusion

As a product of a unique schooling experience and a journey in higher education, John Wesley was prepared, at least publicly, for a life in the ministry of the Anglican church. Upon accepting an opportunity to enter the mission field in America, on his overseas trip to the Georgia colony, John witnessed the bold strength of the Moravians, aboard a ship in the midst of a storm. He began to associate with them, learning German and being asked probing questions like “Do you know Jesus Christ?” And “Has he saved you?” Answering these questions was not as easy as a college-trained Christian minister might think. The church members should be disciplined in such a manner that people can answer these questions with ease and confidence.

The Georgia experience was originally seen by John as an opportunity to evangelize native Americans and pastor a small church. Because of personal relations with a member and his subsequent discipline of the same lady, a troubling situation that

³⁹ Ayling, *John Wesley*, 311.

⁴⁰ Hampton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*, 99.

made him more than ready to go home to England. How do we deal with troubling situations in the pursuit of our ministries? Are they seen as opportunities to grow in our faith and be better when we come out the other side, or are they means or excuses for an exit from the work God has called us to do?

John had a signature pivotal moment when he went to a meeting in Aldersgate Street and experienced his conversion, “feeling his heart strangely warmed.” How often is it that Christian leaders, both lay and clergy, find themselves “having the learning, but not the burning,” doing the work of the church, but not feeling as if they are truly saved? How do we carry ourselves when we are in this situation?

John’s ministry routine, back in England, became characterized by safe traveling by horseback, on preaching tours, and often reading while riding. Do we have peace in our travels for the Lord? Are they seen as a joy or a burden?

One of the great concerns and debates among John, his brother Charles, his friend George Whitefield, and other leaders of this emerging church movement was the meaning and usage of the phrase “Christian Perfection.” On some points, there was agreement, while on other points there was harsh disagreement, so much so, that John would change his definition and application of the phrase to suit the occasion. Are there times you “agree to disagree” with colleagues, concerning theology or church practice? Are there things you know and believe that might prove too much to handle for the average layperson or some clergy?

John had to make a difficult decision to help the Methodist Societies move forward. If he ordained American Methodist ministers, it would mean a break with the Church of England, something he had sought from the beginning to avoid. Yet the

American colonies declaring their independence in 1776 meant that such a break with the Church of England was unavoidable if Methodism would succeed in America. How do we handle decisions that can change the very nature of the modern-day church?

John Wesley emphasized that the answers to challenges we face, as Christians, are found in one book. Hear how he advised a recent convert to the faith, on the subject of a plan for Christian Education at Home. “You want to know God, in order to enjoy home in time and in eternity. All that you want to know about Him is contained in one book, the Bible. Therefore, your one point is to understand this might it not be well, then, to spend at least two hours every day in reading and meditating upon the Bible...”⁴¹ By our standards, two hours of study of the Bible, each day, might be a challenge, but at the same time, it can be seen as a goal to reach. May our study of the Word not take a back seat to the study of the world, which we spend an inordinate amount of time doing.

⁴¹ David Lyle Jeffrey, *A Burning and a Shrine Light: English Spirituality in the Age of Wesley* (Grand Rapids, MI: Williams B. Eerdmans Publishing company, 1987), 244, 245.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Chapter Four reflection Ecclesiology concerns the nature, identity, and mission of the church. Meaningful examination of congregational practice must begin with a clear articulation of what the church is in its essence before considering what it does in its activity. A faithful ecclesiology requires that the church's identity be normed by Scripture while remaining historically self-conscious in its expression. When historical patterns, institutional rhythms, or inherited traditions begin to function as the primary of congregational life, the church risks grounding its identity in continuity rather than calling. This ecclesiological analysis sought to clarify the theological foundation of the church and assess how the foundation informed the lived practices of Ardis Chapel Church.

In the theological topic of ecclesiology, there is tension between seeing the church's history as her foundation versus a foundation based on the word of God. The book, *Exploring Ecclesiology*, informs us that "an ecclesiology should be grounded in the Christian scriptures, for they constitute on completely authoritative witness for the church's theology...A theology of the church should also be historically self-conscious."¹

¹ Brad Harper, and Paul Louis Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 1.

The church derives its core identity from its relationship with the Triune God.² In Ardis Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church this tension was exhibited by an inward focus on the definition of church. The members were more concerned about an established yearly calendar that reflects community and family relationships than the primary focus of the church, that of making disciples. As long as this limited vision was embraced, and the established roles of individual members maintained, even though they were incorrect, the members thought they were having a good year. An example of this was when one sought to clarify the proper manner in which financial contributions should be received and recorded, according to our *Book of Discipline*. This resulted in a meeting and further discussions, along family lines, with little regard for bringing procedures in line with what was right for the church.

Exploring Ecclesiology explores this inward focus when it says, “When Christianity places undue emphasis on the individual, it reduces the church to a group of believing individuals or, worse, sees Christian identity as separate from participation in Christian community.”³ If my church members, with an inward focus, saw themselves as a club or a clique, not a community, then there was little interest in fellowship, and emphasizing the need to be equipped to disciple other people. This led to the problem statement this paper would address, that the members of Ardis Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church were not making disciples of the unchurched people that they encounter from the surrounding community.

² Harper and Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology*, 14.

³ Harper and Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology*, 42.

Our church was in a diversely populated community, with a focus on golf course and new home development, versus the old established neighborhood. Members need to be challenged to think differently about nearby areas that are fertile fields of harvest. As people drove a distance for work and school, they too may drive a distance to worship in and regularly attend a church about kingdom building. A series of sessions would be offered on Christian discipleship. The hypothesis of this theological foundation chapter was that if the members participate in a focus study on Christian discipleship, then they would be equipped with the tools necessary to disciple other people.

The main body of the chapter will be a series of summaries of the thoughts of various theologians about the discipleship process and the researcher's reactions to the author's opinions and conclusions. Special attention will be given to statements from the authors that assert their opinions are those of the majority of theologians. The comparative study of these opinions will lead to a path forward in preparation for the planned sessions of disciple-making for Ardis Chapel Church. The conclusion of the chapter will summarize the findings.

Comparative Theologians' Thoughts on Discipleship

Dr. Robert D. Mansfield, in the book *What Is Great Commission Discipleship?* tells us that “discipleship is the act of being a discipler.”⁴ The author goes on to say “discipleship may be the least understood, most imprecisely defined term related to Christianity. Too many pastors and lay people either ignore Jesus’ command found in

⁴ Roberto D. Mansfield, *What Is Great Commission Discipleship?* (Middletown, DE: Evangelistic Discipling, 2024), 5.

Matthew 28:19-20, or assume they are already doing it without giving it any thought.”⁵

Agreeing with the author that more Christians state that they are connected to the Lord not just because they were discipled by others, the pastor and laity feel that there is no need to put themselves in place of God. They think people should disciple themselves and not depend on the clergy and laity being there to help in the process. “The sad truth is that many Christians grow closer to the Lord despite our inaction...Some may try to excuse themselves by saying that spiritual growth is God’s business; all I can do is plant the seed.’ At the end of the day, we lament that there is no evidence of spiritual growth. Maybe that is because doing church, the way we have always done it is not enough. We must disciple, and we must know what that means.”⁶

The author views discipleship as comprising two components: gaining knowledge and transforming lives. They state, “Discipleship is not about what we know, but what we know must impact our lives. Discipleship will change our lives.”⁷

Mark Denver and Jonathan Leeman, in their book, *Understanding the Great Commission*, looking at the Great Commission, Matthew 28:18-20, speak of the grammar present in the text, the action words – “After asserting this authority, Jesus tells his disciples to make disciples. Grammatically, this is the one imperative verb in the original Greek: make disciples. And that command is surrounded by three participles, so that we could translate the verbal phrases like this: ‘Going, make disciples, baptizing and

⁵ Mansfield, *What Is Great Commission Discipleship?*, 5.

⁶ Mansfield, *What Is Great Commission Discipleship?*, 6.

⁷ Mansfield, *What Is Great Commission Discipleship?*, 53.

teaching.”⁸ But if making disciples depends on going, baptizing, and teaching, who is sending the goers? And who is doing the baptizing and teaching? Is this work accomplished primarily through individual evangelizing and discipling? Or some other way? “The Great Commission is normally fulfilled through planting and growing churches. So, the Great Commission involves you, the individual Christian. But the Great Commission also involves you through your local church. That is the normal way God means for us to go, make disciples, baptize, and teach.”⁹

The disciple-making process is centered in the local church. Great evangelistic crusades from years past have always connected with local churches in the neighborhoods of their planned events to ensure that pastors and members could receive the anticipated converts from the services. The local church, in turn, continues the process of baptism and teaching. Too often nowadays, online Christian media can seem like an end in itself regarding disciple-making, as if local church membership and follow-up are now optional.

The authors assert that “Where the Gospel Goes, Churches Show Up. It turns out that the story of the gospel’s spread is the story of the spread of churches... Who sends out the apostles and other delegates? The local church...To whom do these delegates come back and report? The local church...Who’s making decisions? The local church.”¹⁰ The story is viewed as a reason for the need for denominational oversight in the area of local church relocation consideration and church planting plans. If neighborhoods are no

⁸ Mark Denver and Jonathan Leeman, *Understanding the Great Commission* (Nashville, TN: B and H Publishing Group, 2016), 2.

⁹ Denver and Leeman, *Understanding the Great Commission*, 9.

¹⁰ Denver and Leeman, *Understanding the Great Commission*, 20.

longer what they once were, in regards to population, established churches may need to think about relocating, as has one of the leading churches in our Annual Conference.

Where we seldom see church mergers or new church plants, these are viable options to consider, if we are serious about carrying out our disciple-making goals. We should also consider the blessing of having retired or superannuated ministers as part of our churches.

Many retired colleagues possess a wealth of experience that can greatly benefit the disciple-making process. Although they no longer hold pastoral appointments, as associate ministers, they could be assigned special duties that involve various aspects of disciple-making. The same applies to many members of the laity who may believe their days of service are behind them. Additionally, the responsibility of caring for and instructing one another reinforces the notion that teaching should primarily take place within the context of a local church and its accountability. Jason S. Sexton and Stanley N. Guidry's book *Four Views on The Church's Mission* presents a unique format in which four contributors each write on one of the views of mission while the other three write their responses.

Jonathan Leeman, in a section titled "*Soteriological Mission: Focusing on the Mission of Redemption*," poses the question: Who has God authorized to do what? "The church-as-organized-collective has been authorized to preach a message of reconciliation, to separate holy from unholy by identifying repenting sinners with God, and to teach them. Making disciples requires not only the speech of courtrooms and embassies, it also requires priests (If you think I'm mixing metaphors, just remember how many metaphors

Paul used to describe the church!) As a biblical theological reference, I think we can say that the exercise of authority by the church-as-organized-collective is priestly.¹¹

The descriptive term “The church-as-organized collective” was found to be an appropriate description of how the church ought to function. It calls for leadership and followership, to be an organized collective. Also, the priestly reference was appropriate when one considers the priesthood of all believers, supporting work for both laity and clergy in the Great Commission. The Church too often puts her work in the clergy camp, allowing the laity to define for themselves what, if anything, is expected of them to do in Christian Service. This leads to a “maintaining the status quo” mindset, especially when new clerical leadership comes with a new vision. “The church-as-organized collective” would work against such thinking, and help leaders and followers find common ground in this important work. The narrow mission of a church-as-organized-collective is to

Christopher J. H. Wright responds to Leeman’s thoughts: “Now a fairly obvious difference exists between the church-as-collective and the church-as-members scattered in their various callings out in the world. However, I wonder if Leeman makes too much of that difference, creating a dichotomy that might be hard to sustain biblically...I wonder if it would be more helpful to concentrate on the relationship between the church-gathered-for worship and the church-scattered-in-the-world. That is a distinction reflected in Paul’s letters. From what he writes to the churches in Corinth and Colossae, and to Timothy and Titus, Paul envisages Christians gathering together...But the immediate

¹¹ Jason S. Sexton and Stanley N. Guidry, *Four Views on the Church’s Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 39.

outcome of such gathered living, loving and learning together is transformed lives in the wider community of family and society.”¹²

This a powerful viewpoint, that all we do as the church should center on the cross. The local church’s focus has so often been on “meeting perceived needs” and “community outreach and service,” that the Lord’s sacrifice, the sacrifice we each are called to be inspired by and highly appreciative sacrifice being viewed mainly as an image for Communion Sunday and the seasonal themes of Lent and Eastertide. How can we keep the Cross before us as our motivating tool while also maintaining a vision of the new life we are inviting people to through disciple-making?

John Swinton and Harriett Mowat, in their book *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* tell us that “The church does not exist fundamentally to meet needs; in its being, the church like Christ, exists to glorify the Father.”¹³ The authors go on to say that Practical Theology therefore finds itself located within the uneasy but critical tension between the script of revelation given to us in Christ as formulated historically within scripture, doctrine, and tradition, and the continuing innovative performance of the gospel as it embodied and enacted in the life and practices of the Church as they interact with the life and practices of the world.

These authors are asking us to answer the question, as the church: “Why do we do what we do?” This is a very challenging question, one that informs our understanding of what God wants from His Church and what we do. When the world takes on the authority to say to a Christian, “And you call yourself a Christian!” what is our response? How can

¹² Sexton and Guidry, *Four Views on The Church’s Mission*, 48.

¹³ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London, UK: Canterbury Press, 2006), 4.

we define who we are and whose we are, defending the faith against how the world thinks the gospel life should be lived out? We should remain faithful to the word of God, as the authors put it: “the original God-given plot of the gospel and to practice faithfully as that narrative unfolds!”¹⁴ We must be the experts, putting to use daily the directions God has given us to live by and to disciple by. Would not it feel good to be such an authentic follower of Jesus Christ and his mission that any one of us could be held up as an example of the phrase from the Negro spiritual: “talk about a child that do love Jesus.” Here’s one!

Bill Pentax, as a cub reporter for the Texas Star, landed an interview with Theodore McBride, one of the most respected business leaders in America. As the interview began, McBride spoke of the seven greatest management principles that had been handed down to him and that he would share with this young reporter. Joining Dr. Kevin Leman, Pentax produced the book, *The Way of The Shepherd: Seven Secrets of Managing Productive People*. “Principle number one, Know the Condition of Your Flock, tells the reader to get to know your flock, one sheep at a time.”¹⁵ To get to know your flock, however, in my context findings it manageable by personal interaction and creating space for each sheep. It is not a one-size-fits-all approach.

Principle number four encouraged the reader to Make Your Pasture a Safe Place, to infuse every position with importance. “Regularly rotate the sheep to fresh pastures. Don’t give problems time to fester.”¹⁶ It is interesting to compare the church, as a flock of

¹⁴ Swinton and Harriet, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 5.

¹⁵ Kevin Leman, and Bill Pentax, *The Way of the Shepherd: Seven Secrets of Managing Productive People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 115.

¹⁶ Leman and Pentax, *The Way of The Shepherd*, 116.

sheep, with real sheep and a shepherd's duties to care for them. Principle Number Four speaks of the pasture as a safe place. Compare this to church members who have experienced "church hurt," and made decisions about whether to return to a local church, go to another church, or leave church completely, because of this hurt. How can we make our "pastures" safe places for our existing "flock of sheep" and those we will be blessed to disciple? This is a question for all the leadership, not only the pastor, but also the "leading sheep," church officers.

The foreword to Brandon Hatmaker's book, *Barefoot Church/Serving the Least in a Consumer Culture*: "Brandon Hatmaker issues a clear call to the church to remember her practical, spiritual heritage as the visible manifestation of God's kingdom rule. He reminds us that the most world-changing work we may do may not be in the halls of governmental power, but rather, among the poor, the homeless, and those who are victims of injustice. He draws our attention to some of the weaknesses of the church in our Western culture-how being Christ to the poor can easily become just another ministry on top of our other programs, worship services, small groups, and Bible studies... "To be the body of Christ, we would do well to remember that our bare feet, rather than being adorned with Gucci's and Jimmy Choo's, need only be dressed with the gospel of peace, a gospel through which lives will be changed, not the least of which will be our own."¹⁷

In chapter one, entitled "There's Got to Be More," the author described how we tend to do mission work in local churches.¹⁸ "We as church leaders tell our people to go. We tell them to be good news. And we assume they do. We assume they know how.

¹⁷ Brandon Hatmaker, *Barefoot Church: Serving the Least in a Consumer Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 11.

¹⁸ Hatmaker, *Barefoot Church*, 16.

While we've been charged to 'equip the saints' for works of service, the brutal truth is that most of us have reduced our expectations of 'serving' to a once-a-month tour of duty as an usher or greeter. We've settled for serving ourselves and serving as an event rather than serving those in need and living a new way of life that Jesus has called us to."¹⁹

The challenge of doing ministry in the hierarchical church is that each local church has levels of authority above it. They are required to satisfy the directives, while dealing with local issues and concerns. For example, if directives come down to the local church that call for a missionary response to a distant matter, like the unfortunate disaster experiences from Hurricane Helene, does this stop any other initiatives developed locally from taking place too. Prayerfully not. It can happen though, that response to the hierarchical directives can cause a local church to fail to have a presence in the community, which is the place where they seek to make a daily difference. This requires leadership to be creative and resourceful in our responses, so that the locals of a local church are not overlooked in times of need.

Hatmaker emphasized the need to expand our understanding of discipleship, saying, "At the very heart of discipleship is the spirit of recurrent disciple making. As long as our discipleship process remains rigid and dependent on its initiator, it will always be short of its potential. Is it possible that we're not seeing the spiritual fruit of transformation resulting in self-motivation and devotion because we're not making true disciples? Are we creating codependent disciples? Codependency does not blossom; it does not reproduce; it only creates more codependency."²⁰

¹⁹ Hatmaker, *Barefoot Church*, 16.

²⁰ Hatmaker, *Barefoot Church*, 110.

David C. Meade, in the book *Missions on Point/The Local Church at the Heart of Ecclesiology and Missiology*, opined “in the Great Commission, we have all these elements: evangelization, discipleship, administration of church ordinances by recognized leaders, and regular meetings of believers to learn and apply the teachings of the Word of God. What we have is a local church.”²¹

The author paid special attention to the local church in the areas of ecclesiology and evangelism. The heart of this essential work of our faith is centered in the local church, to be enacted by each congregation. The commitment to gather faithfully for worship and training is crucial for each local church to fulfill the Great Commission. We must emphasize that evangelism is not a seasonal activity, with its goals accomplished only during revival season. This work is the reason the church exists and thus must be pursued daily. How can we keep disciple-making at the forefront? Can this be achieved through targeted Bible studies, church school lessons, and Sunday morning sermons alone, or do we need to assign some “homework” or promote routine personal practices that inspire our members to recognize the opportunities God places in our midst to engage in Great Commission work throughout the week?

Bobby Harrington and Josh Patrick, in *The Disciple Maker’s Handbook: Seven Elements of a Discipleship Lifestyle*, emphasized the lifestyle changes that come with salvation. They tell us that “Being saved by a Savior is wonderful, but it doesn’t stop there. Salvation is transformational, changing our foundation, our identity... We have a new life, a new identity, and a mere calling. We give our lives to Jesus as Lord, and we

²¹ David C. Meade, *Missions on Point: The Local Church at the Heart of Ecclesiology and Missiology* (San Francisco, CA: Send Forward, 2024), 52.

help others to do the same. That is the heart of disciple-making.”²² They say further: So while conversion is the most important step in the journey, involving a fundamental change in our identity, life transformation is the end goal. The mission Jesus entrusted to us is to teach people how to form their entire lives around his new identity, rooted in his lordship. This is why our definition of disciple is not just about the commitment to follow Jesus but also to be changed by Jesus and to be committed to his kingdom mission. We want whole life discipleship because we want whole life disciples.²³

The authors addressed the real-world needs of new converts to the Christian faith. First Peter 3:15 calls on Christians to “...always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you for the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...” (NIV). Unfortunately, some of us have encountered Christians who shared their faith in a manner that was not described in this verse but rather were threatening and offensive in proclaiming the need for salvation. It is important to help prepare new disciples and further educate older disciples on how to share the good news. The Gospel message should not be handled haphazardly, but rather in a prayerful, Spirit-led way. This is also a positive experience for both parties involved, honoring our Savior Jesus Christ’s loving sacrifice on behalf of all people.

James H. Evans, Jr., and Stephen G. Ray, Jr., in *We Have Been Believers: An African American Systematic Theology*, spoke of the challenge of theological discourse from the African American Christian perspective and its application to the broader theological education community. They seek to answer, “How does one reconstruct

²² Bobby Harrington and Josh Patrick, *The Disciple Maker’s Handbook: Seven Elements of a Discipleship Lifestyle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 22.

²³ Harrington and Patrick, *The Disciple Maker’s Handbook*, 40.

systematic theology so that, as a recognizable reflection of the African American tradition of the Christian communities, it can offer the genius and creativity of that tradition to the entire Church?”²⁴

The subject of African American Ecclesiology is one fraught with a history of slavery’s aftermath and the ongoing racism of many in our twenty-first century American culture. The African American Church experience is one that benefits all that learn of it, but we still tend to worship solely with those who share similar backgrounds, limiting their understanding of the legacy of other Christians. Ecumenical gatherings, collaborative missionary efforts, and college/seminary activities that bridge socio-racial divides positively challenge Christians to “come and see.” “Come and hear,” and “come and share” in the lives of our brothers and sisters who may be different from us, but in many respects, are not so different after all. This is the God-pleasing fellowship and sharing that shapes the Church into what God intends for us to be.

Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, the authors of *Introduction to Theology*, had interesting things to say about the word mission and how it is used in relation to the church. They said that “The church does not exist as an end in itself for its own sake but for the sake of the world, that the world may come to know its origin, meaning, and goal in God. The church exists to be the instrument of God in the divine mission to the world, and, thus, as the servant of the world... Thus, the mission of the church is not to be understood in terms of the world being drawn into the church, but in terms of the world

²⁴ James H. Evans, Jr. and Stephen G. Ray, Jr., *We Have Been Believers: An African American Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), xvii.

attaining its own true fulfillment through the testimony and service of the church. This was summarized in the slogan ‘The church does not have a mission; it is mission.’²⁵

This slogan, “The church does not have a mission; it is mission,” could easily be misunderstood; it might suggest that the church merely exists without purpose. Additionally, it raises the question of how to define the term “church” without limiting its meaning. Too often, people try to define what the church is or is not based on its past local history. For example, selling food as a fundraiser is a time-honored tradition in certain churches, yet these events can undermine the more biblically based practices of giving our tithes and offerings to support the church’s work. If the church lacks a mission, how can we articulate what we do? If the church is a mission, does that refer only to a place rather than a community? Gaining greater clarity on this issue would be advantageous.

Christopher J. H. Wright and Jonathan Lundy, in their book, *The Mission of God’s People/ A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission*, made plain their stance about how theology and church work together. They said, “There should be no theology that does not relate to the mission of the church, either by being generated out of the church’s mission or by inspiring and shaping it. And there should be no mission of the church carried on without deep theological roots in the soil of the Bible.”²⁶ The authors called for a balanced approach to theology and mission in the church's life. Theology can come across as a field, disconnected from the everyday Christian

²⁵ Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction to Theology/Third Edition* (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), 262.

²⁶ Christopher J. H. Wright and Jonathan Lundy, *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 20.

experience. Moreover, terms that describe different areas of theology, such as ecclesiology and eschatology, rarely make their way into sermons, Bible study courses, or Church School lessons. Yet, theology and mission are intrinsically linked; one cannot exist meaningfully without the other. We must simplify theology into more accessible components to ensure that the mission we promote receives clear support from God's Word. In the section titled "People Who Know the One Living God and Savior," the authors further emphasized, "Knowing God is one of the most pervasive themes in biblical theology....But one might be tempted to ask what it has to do with the mission of God's people. Knowing God seems to have more to do with personal devotion and spiritual experience than with mission."²⁷ The author's summary statement defining the church states, "Churches, then, are to be communities around the world, planted, nurtured and connected through ministries of sending, going and supporting the sake of the name of Christ and the truth of the gospel."²⁸

Conclusion

In considering the comparative thoughts of theologians on discipleship, the researcher aimed to identify key points that support the project proposal hypothesis: the development and implementation of a course of study for making disciples within the church community. The local church is indeed the center of the disciple-making process, as conversion, baptism, and teaching occur there. Another key point is the importance of how a local church should operate. The descriptive term "the church-as-organized

²⁷ Wright and Lundy, *The Mission of God's People*, 151.

²⁸ Wright and Lundy, *The Mission of God's People*, 221.

collective” was introduced to address the need for leadership and followership in the church's work. It is essential to emphasize that the priesthood of all believers, as taught in 1 Peter 2:9, upholds the work for both laity and clergy within the Great Commission. Many of our laity are often satisfied to delegate disciple-making entirely to the clergy. These lay members tend to define Christian service for themselves, which contributes to a status-quo mindset. This mindset poses challenges, particularly when new clerical leadership arrives with a new vision. Promoting “the church-as-organized collective” encourages leaders and followers to collaboratively share in this vital work.

It is important for the church to own the defining process, answering the question: why do we do what we do? Being sensitive to occasions when the world tries to define what a Christian should be and what the church should represent. We must remain faithful to the Word of God as we follow the directive given to us by God to live and disciple accordingly. At the same time, there is the additional challenge of conducting ministry within a hierarchical church, where each local church is expected to function as a community church while being agreeable to various levels above it. The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church is an example of such a hierarchical structure, with many local churches composing districts. When members of a local church seldom, if ever, participate in activities at the higher levels, they can be described as receiving a pastor from their denomination but refusing to be part of it. Thus, pastors and leading laity must advocate for a disciple-making approach that encompasses all levels of the church.

A key point in the disciple-making process is how we approach potential converts to the faith. First Peter 3:15 urges Christians to “always be ready, always to give an

answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But to do this with gentleness and respect.” It is crucial that we emphasize sharing the gospel in this way, never with a threatening or offensive demeanor. The experience should be positive for everyone involved.

When we consider African American ecclesiology as a theological foundation for our project, we must be sensitive to our heritage as descendants of slaves and those who continue to face racism in our twenty-first-century American culture. Our church experience is one from which the broader church in America can benefit, but African American Christians should celebrate and share this experience. Through ecumenical gatherings, joint missionary opportunities, and similar initiatives, we can reach across social and racial divides, inviting both the saved and unsaved to come and witness the church in action.

One of the reference books studied in this chapter, *The Way of the Shepherd: Seven Secrets to Managing Productive People*, demonstrated that there are models we can follow from non-biblical sources in the disciple-making process. The business world provides examples of employee training methodologies that can be applied to develop a course of study for disciple-making in a local church. Procter and Gamble’s method of indoctrinating their employees will serve as the basis for the Interdisciplinary Foundations chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Chapter five gave insight from business management while the church is a theological community grounded in divine calling, it is also an organized body that operates within structured systems. Organizational health, leadership clarity, and strategic alignment significantly influence how effectively a congregation embodies its mission. For this reason, principles drawn from business management provided valuable tools was used to evaluate congregational effectiveness. This chapter offered an organizational analysis of Ardis Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church. These principles illuminated why disciple-making became normative within the congregation.

It is often expressed, either directly or indirectly, that the church should not function like a business, as it is fundamentally a spiritual entity, a sacred household of faith. However, this perspective may imply that certain principles inherent in effective business operations and organizational leadership are at odds with the core values that the church is meant to embody. This assumption invites a deeper examination of how business management practices and organizational leadership could coexist harmoniously with the church's mission regarding stewardship and spiritual objectives. John W. Wimberly, Jr., a pastor with an MBA, MDIV, and a PhD in systematic theology, shared

his strong positive views on the church through the lens of the business world's management model.

The importance of church management is magnified when we understand that the Christian church is the original, largest, and wealthiest multinational corporation in the world. Almost two thousand years before Citibank, GE, or Microsoft, the church began to accumulate assets and personnel... Today, the Christian church owns hundreds of millions of acres and hectares of property, including prime real estate sites in the centers of the world's richest cities. The church has a cash flow of billions of dollars annually... Would any other large corporation dare to operate without making certain it had skilled managers in place? So why does the church send its managers (both clergy and lay) into the field without management training and support?¹

Therefore, this interdisciplinary chapter focused on business management, emphasizing stewardship in relation to discipleship. The goal was to apply the highest standards from the business sector to enhance the work and growth of the church, particularly in terms of making disciples. This research examined the definition of a manager, the recruitment of staff, and the organization of a team approach to build and empower organizations, helping them progress toward greatness. The field of Business Management provided a valuable framework that complements and enriches the primary focus of this doctoral project.

It was interesting to notice that changing the terminology—by removing or substituting a few words—can make many descriptions of contemporary, relevant business management practices applicable to successful church activities as well. For example, one can replace “manager or team leaders” with “pastor or class leaders” in numerous business management directives, and you will quickly see their relevance in fulfilling the Great Commission. “The key words here are ‘shared vision.’ It is a vision

¹ John W. Wimberly, Jr., *The Business of the Church* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2010), 2-3.

that the entire team shares. It is one vision that unites and inspires the team members individually and collectively. This one vision serves as a north star that moves everyone on the team in the same direction.”² The other significant phrase is ‘greater purpose.’ Research indicates that people are most energized when they utilize their strengths for a larger purpose, one that goes beyond themselves as individuals.³ Additionally, this research sought to encourage the idea that the church serves as a place or environment where individuals should feel a strong sense of connection, purpose, and identity. This feeling of belonging nurtures loyalty, dedication, and a collective commitment to attaining excellence.

It may also reflect some of the negative experiences both the saved and the unsaved have faced in the workplace. Consider how you have heard jobs described and how work ethic is portrayed in our various forms of media. This interdisciplinary chapter aims to use the highest standards of the business world to promote the primary mission of the church: making disciples. How one defines managers, staff, employees, and teams can significantly impact the level of success achieved in business. Additionally, the interest in personal, group, team, and organizational growth and development is crucial in determining whether a business remains in maintenance mode or attains historic staying power and greatness. How people perceive work and their role in it greatly influences success or failure, both in the business sector and the church.

Several resources informed the subject areas of business management, leadership development, and team building to look for comparable teachings applicable to the

² Jon Gordon, *The Power of a Positive Team* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc, 2018), 28.

³ Gordon, *The Power of a Positive Team*, 28.

church ministry setting. The authors of these books conducted surveys and studies, presenting their findings and recommendations on how the success of some businesses can benefit others. Throughout this writing process, the authors often cited findings from highly successful CEOs in business management, documenting their failures and successes, challenges, and victories as paradigms for those in the business world seeking formulas for success. This research defined business management as the operational policies for effectively running a business from the top down. This definition also highlighted organizational leadership, emphasizing that all levels must understand their responsibilities and the need to work as a team to succeed. The definitions of business management and organizational leadership can be aptly applied to a local church, where clarity in organizational structure and ongoing leadership development play a vital role in the church's chief mandate of making disciples. Personal accounts and quotes from experts in these defined fields of business practice have also been considered by the researcher in writing this chapter.

The body of this chapter reviewed the introduction and conclusion sections of the project proposal abstract, along with the historical, biblical, and theological chapters. It also included summary and response statements from the relevant business management resource materials that support the doctoral project's end goals. The chapter will aim to answer the following questions:

1. How does the theory or framework shape my research in the areas previously researched and reported on?
2. How does the new information from my Interdisciplinary Theory address the problem, hypothesis and solution of the project?

3. What new insights have I gained?
4. How do these insights from the Interdisciplinary Theory interact with and shape my understanding of the continued work of the project?

The end result of the application of the business management model to the researcher's local church is that it is good to imagine, dream, and conclude that our church can be better by adopting some new disciplines. Brian Moss, while attending a pastor's conference, heard something that challenged his business administration roots.

You all came here from the church that you have now, but if you could start your church from scratch and build the church of your dreams, what would it look like? What would you focus on? What would the activities be? How would it function? More importantly, why aren't you leading the church of your dreams? What do you need to do in order to lead that kind of church?⁴

The conclusion section will summarize the researcher's findings and applications.

Historical Foundation

The purpose of the previous chapter was to explore some pivotal moments in the life of a significant figure in Church History, Reverend John Wesley. His life was marked by major shifts and fluctuations, characterized by actions that deviated from the norms expected by the established Anglican Church. Yet, as I examined these pivotal moments, especially the initial ones, I concluded that John Wesley was indeed a product of his environment, perhaps more significantly influenced by his upbringing than one might expect today. Wesley progressed from what equates to modern-day homeschooling through the ranks of formal clergy training, developing skills in group training and support. His family and classmates became the forerunners of the class system that

⁴ Brian Moss, *The D.R.E.A.M.* (Middletown, DE: Independently Published, 2023), 4.

emerged in the first Methodist churches. It was the standard set by his mother, Susanna Wesley, that propelled John to levels of achievement that would be difficult to match by today's standards, where it is rare to see someone so young advance so significantly while still being educated at home. The researcher observed the beginnings of foundational components of Methodism that are part of the daily life of a select group of students whom John will lead.

In times of stress and challenges, hope and encouragement came to him from quite unexpected places as Wesley learned from the Moravians how to address an important question about the Christian life. This contact eventually led John to major changes in how he fulfilled his calling and inspired him to lead a growing movement that became a new denominational category. Wesley did not seek to reform the church of England but rather to promote authentic Christian living among its members through small-group discipleship.

John led a structured and orderly life from childhood onward. Discipline influenced his understanding of the Christian life and played a significant role in his expectations of those who joined the early Methodist societies. It may be time to reconsider "how we do what we do" in the church and how we prioritize our actions. Our top priority is to make disciples, which is the main focus of the Doctor of Ministry project. Wesley's emphasis on discipline and the management of those he led aligned with the ideas presented by John C. Maxwell in his book *Leadershift*. Maxwell asserts:

As leaders, we can't drag our feet or take too long making assessments. We have to change, reread our situation, and change again. And 'continue' changing. How does a leader do more than just hang on and survive in such an environment? The key is to learn how to continually make leadershifts. What is a Leadershift? It is

an ability and willingness to make a leadership change that will positively enhance organizational and personal growth.⁵

Leadershift calls for adaptability! “Good leaders adapt. They gift. They don’t remain static because they know the world around them does not remain static.”⁶

John had a signature pivotal moment when he went to a meeting in Aldersgate Street and experienced his conversion, “feeling his heart strangely warmed.” How often do Christian leaders, both lay and clergy, find themselves “having the learning but not the burning,” doing the work of the church but not feeling as if they are truly saved? How do we carry ourselves when we are in this situation? “The truth is this: every advance you make as a leader will require a leadershift that changes the way you think, act and lead...If you want to be an effective leader, you must leadershift. You cannot be the same, think the same, and act the same if you hope to be successful in a world that does not remain the same.”⁷

How are leaders to thrive in this environment? We must learn, unlearn, and relearn. This process is essential to leadershift long term. We have to embrace change every day. We must be willing to let go of what worked yesterday and learn new ways of seeing, doing, and leading. We cannot afford to be in love with any one technology or methodology. We keep learning and changing, or our leadership dies.⁸

The study of John Wesley’s life showed that leadership cannot be rigid; it must change as circumstances dictate. Wesley had to make such changes, including assigning lay preachers to his new societies—something quite controversial for the Church of

⁵ John C. Maxwell, *Leadershift* (Nashville, TN: Harper Collins Leadership, 2019), 4.

⁶ Maxwell, *Leadershift*, 4.

⁷ Maxwell, *Leadershift*, 7.

⁸ Maxwell, *Leadershift*, 10.

England—and eventually ordaining American Methodist ministers, which led to a break with his denomination. While this separation from the Church of England was something John Wesley sought to avoid, he reached the decision that fulfilling the work God called him to do was so important that even the church of his birth could not stand in his way. Support for this thinking was found in the business world in the book *Storied Leadership* by Brian Jensen and Keith R. Martel. They take a Christian approach to business leadership and management, asserting:

Our leadership begins with a Kingdom perspective. It points toward a Kingdom vision, and it should always end with a Kingdom purpose. It is impossible to overdo it here. We are simply following the example of Jesus who was always talking about the Kingdom...If we can start to imagine a world that glorifies God—peace not turmoil, love no hate, mercy not selfishness, forgiveness not blame, joy not sorrow—then we will get a small glimpse of how Jesus was entirely Kingdom-crazy. This is the story that shapes our leadership. It is a story that solicits a response...When we are captured by a Kingdom vision, by a picture of what could be and should be, something ignites within us and we move. Leadership is about a movement toward a better world.⁹

Theological Foundation

The book, *Exploring Ecclesiology*, informed us that “An ecclesiology should be grounded in the Christian scriptures, for they constitute on completely authoritative witness for the church’s theology...A theology of the church should also be historically self-conscious ...the church derives its core identity from its relationship with the Triune God.”¹⁰ In Ardis Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, this tension was exhibited by an inward focus on the definition of church. The members were more concerned about an

⁹ Brian Jensen and Keith R. Martel, *Storied Leadership* (Beaver Falls, PA: Falls City Press, 2015), 81.

¹⁰ Brad Harper and Paul Louis Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 1, 14.

established yearly calendar that reflects community and family relationships than the primary focus of the church, that of making disciples. As long as this limited vision was embraced and the established roles of individual members were maintained, even though they were incorrect, the members thought they were having a good year. This led to the problem statement that would be addressed, that the members of Ardis Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church were not making disciples of the unchurched people that they encounter from the surrounding community.

In considering the comparative thoughts of theologians on discipleship, the goal was to identify key points that support the hypothesis of the project proposal: that of developing and implementing a course of study for making disciples from the community of the church I pastor. The descriptive term, *the church-as-organized collective*, was introduced to address the need for leadership and followership in the church's work. It was essential to emphasize that the priesthood of all believers, as taught in 1 Peter 2:9, supports efforts for both laity and clergy in the Great Commission. Too many of our laity were more than content to leave disciple-making entirely in the hands of the clergy. Promoting *the church-as-organized collective* encouraged leaders and followers to share in this vital work together.

It is important for the church to own the defining process by answering the question, "Why do we do what we do?" We must be aware of instances when the world attempts to define what a Christian should be and what the church should represent. The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church exemplifies a hierarchical structure, comprising many local churches organized into districts. When the members of a local church seldom, if ever, attend or participate in activities at higher levels, they can be

described as receiving a pastor from their denomination while refusing to engage with it. Therefore, pastors and leading laity must advocate for an approach to disciple-making that encompasses all levels of the church.

In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins concluded that highly successful companies transition from “Good to Great” by committing “to a standard of excellence based on three elements: Disciplined People (attracting the right individuals to the business and keeping them focused on excellence); Disciplined Thought (being brutally honest about the facts and resisting the temptation to get sidetracked by non-core ideas); and Disciplined Action (understanding what is essential to achieve and what is not).”¹¹ Chapter One tells us, “Good is the Enemy of Great,” setting the tone for the book's central idea: not settling for being good but having a plan to achieve and maintain greatness.

Good is the enemy of great. And that is one of the key reasons why we have so little that becomes great...That good is the enemy of great is not just a business problem. It is a human problem. If we have cracked the code on the question of good to great, we should have something of value to any type of organization...Good churches might become great churches.¹²

These disciplined people place “who” before “what,” thinking “build a superior team...Once you have the right people in place, figure out the best path to greatness.”¹³ Secondly, Collins asserts that Disciplined Thought is the index of leadership that searches for truth and reality in a company’s current condition and future. He says,

Yes, leadership is about vision. But leadership is equally about creating a climate where the truth is heard and brutal facts confronted...Leading from good to great does not mean coming up with the answers and then motivating everyone to

¹¹ Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2001), 13.

¹² Collins, *Good to Great*, 1.

¹³ Collins, *Good to Great*, 47.

follow your messianic vision. It means having the humility to grasp the fact that you do not yet understand enough to have the answers and then to ask the questions that will lead to the best possible insights.¹⁴

In promoting Disciplined Thought, Collins discussed companies that adhere to what he calls the Hedgehog Concept. Using the example of the hedgehog, a “simple animal who knows just one big thing and sticks to it,” he asserts that good-to-great companies focus on what they do best and avoid actions that undermine their success model. He states, “The hedgehog concept is a turning point in the journey from good to great... Disciplined Action... only makes sense in the concept of the hedgehog concept.”¹⁵

Thirdly, Collins called for Disciplined Action, building a workforce culture of freedom and responsibility while remaining within a well-defined operational framework. The author presents an intriguing idea in his suggestion: “Start a ‘Stop Doing’ List.” Collins states, “Most of us lead busy but undisciplined lives. We have ever-expanding ‘to-do’ lists, trying to build momentum by doing, doing, doing, and doing more. And it rarely works. Those who build the good-to-great companies. However, made as much use of ‘stop doing’ lists as ‘to-do’ lists.” When you think about it, a ‘stop doing’ list could prove even more important than a ‘to-do’ list in both our personal and group lives.

A response to much of *Good to Great* was inspired by substituting the words ‘business’ and ‘company’ with ‘church.’ Imagine how a church could be transformed while striving to maintain its core values and heritage. With the right people and a hedgehog determination to cling to a proven path to success, a church can be relevant in

¹⁴ Collins, *Good to Great*, 74-75.

¹⁵ Collins, *Good to Great*, 112.

the present age. Picture what would occur if a church established a ‘don’t do list’ based on the Great Commission. Contemplate the kind of leadership development that could unfold if small group discipleship opportunities, like New Class, Bible Study, and regularly scheduled class meetings, were seen as ways to ensure a continuation of the ‘right people’ embracing the tried and true Hedgehog Concept that, God willing, has granted success in the past and will keep doing so in the present and future.

One can easily see the need for dependable commitment in order to obtain success in any group, be it in the business world or in the church. Henry J. Evans, in his book, *Winning with Accountability*, told us that “successful teams cannot exist without accountability-high performance and accountability go hand-in-hand...Execution fails when accountability-the process and language of transferring strategies into reality is-is missing.”¹⁶ He went on to say:

Without accountability, people are working on the wrong things and feeling like they lack direction and purpose. When accountability is present, people keep their eyes on a very clear prize. They know what they are working toward and how they are going to get there. Accountability gives people and organizations a sense of purpose...Accountability is the secret language within your organization that can create or prevent success.¹⁷

The concept of accountability is viewed as a secret language, suggesting that church members should share the message of salvation with a lost world while recognizing that our practices and procedures are not the property of that world. Too often, those outside the church intrude upon our privacy by claiming their perceived rights to information that we, as a church, must keep as our guiding principles.

¹⁶ Henry J. Evans, *Winning with Accountability* (Dallas, TX: Cornerstone Leadership Institute, 2008), 5.

¹⁷ Evans, *Winning with Accountability*, 6.

When every member focuses on the quality of their communication, the organization begins breeding accountability. The organization then magically transforms into a culture where people invite others to hold them accountable, and hold them accountable, and hold others accountable in a safe and productive manner. When each member begins practicing personal accountability for his/her commitments and is willing to take ownership and recruit Accountability Partners, a higher level of performance begins to emerge.¹⁸

Biblical Foundation

The biblical foundation chapter was written in three parts, the introduction, the exegetical research, and the summary. The introduction provided a general overview of Matthew 28: 18-20 and the themes emphasized in the text. The exegetical research comprised the main body of the paper and is organized in the following manner.¹⁹

Exegetical Research

1. Originator-biography of Matthew
2. Audience- general background of the other disciples and subsequent hearers or readers.
3. The Text- a medium of communication that may have originally been oral in form but moved to and now encounters us in written form.
 - A. Text-Look in several translations for differences over what words, phrases, or even verses are included as part of the original text.

¹⁸ Evans, *Winning with Accountability*, 84-85.

¹⁹ John H. Hayes, and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1987), 25.

- B. Context-use secondary sources to determine only the date, historical background, and (in some detail) the purpose and message of the entire section in which the passage is found.
- C. Content-highlight the presence of such things as contrasts, similarities, repetition of keywords or phrases, and development in argumentation, both within your unit and between the several units that precede and follow your unit.
- D. Analysis of the Argument - assess 'why' it is stated or why it is stated at this particular place within the overall 'argument' of the broader edition.

Dave Buehrung, in his *The Great Opportunity: Make Disciples of Jesus in Every Vocation*, asked an interesting question "Have you ever paused to consider your calling, where Jesus has uniquely appointed you to serve on behalf of Himself and His Kingdom within society? Another way to ask this is, how does Jesus express Himself through you as his personal ambassador to the world around you?"²⁰

In the Barna Group research, "they also found the word 'calling' is first associated with ministering to or serving others, with a subtle received hierarchy with ministry-related vocations at the top, and others at the bottom."²¹ "The word 'calling' is rooted in the Latin word '*vocatio*,' from which we get in English, the word 'vocation.' Jesus has intended that our vocation be the primary way of expressing our calling."²² Matthew 28:18-20 has been called "The Great Commission." It expresses the calling or mission

²⁰ Buehrung, *The Great Opportunity*, 18.

²¹ Buehrung, *The Great Opportunity*, 49.

²² Buehrung, *The Great Opportunity*, 8.

that Jesus gave Christians to follow. Edward Hinson says that the Great Commission “Forms the biblical basis for mission and evangelism.”²³

He went on to say, concerning verse nineteen, that “The goal of missions is to ‘teach all nations.’ The idea is to make disciples. The commission of Christ’s followers is not just to tell the story and move on but to create faith communities-churches-where living out the Christian life becomes the basis for the evangelization of the world.”²⁴ It is the goal of this biblical foundation chapter to examine the message and application of Matthew 28:18-20, so that I may clearly present to my church the vision that Jesus gives us in the text so that fulfilling its mandate will be the top priority of all the members.

Initial research concluded that Ardis Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church’s yearly routine could easily be described as maintenance ministry. Prayerfully considering scriptural support for the anticipated Doctor of Ministry project’s focus on evangelism as the church’s primary goal led to Matthew 28:19-20. It was of the utmost importance for the survival of this church, and for understanding the individual work of every member, that the focus and agenda going forward change to prioritize making disciples, rather than just performing the tasks of “yearly church work”! If disciples are made and current members embrace a return to the church’s Great Commission, the work of the church will be accomplished.

The church's sole priority is spreading the gospel and leading souls to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. All other activities of the church and its members are

²³ Edward E. Hindson, Daniel R. Mitchell, eds., *King James Version Bible Commentary for Today* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson/Harper Collins Christian Publishing, Inc., 2010), 1270.

²⁴ Hindson and Mitchell, *King James Version Bible Commentary for Today*, 1270.

secondary to this priority and ought to draw their existence from the primary work Jesus gave us to do.

The biblical foundation for this hypothesis was the examination and application of Matthew 28:19-20, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Ryan Hawk, and Cupp Brooks, in their book *The Score That Matters/Growing Excellence in Yourself and Those You Lead*, using a sports analogy, said that:

There is nothing wrong with keeping score. A score is simply a comparison. At best, it offers feedback on our progress and helps us identify our strengths and weaknesses and those of our teams. However, at its worst, keeping score depletes us of our confidence and tempts us to betray our values. At the very moment that trusting our process becomes critical, the scoreboard can inject doubt in even the best-laid plan. The difference lies in where the score resides. Eternally driven scores often leave us feeling like we are never enough. Regardless of how well we perform, we can always find someone doing better, with a bigger house, a superior job, or a more lucrative salary... The outer scoreboard is extrinsic in principle but all too often internal in practice. It serves as proof of our success—money, fame, material possessions, wins— and happiness. Anything that affirms our success and achievement will do.²⁵

As one considers a business model of team building as a comparison to training church members to prioritize fulfilling the Great Commission, these authors asserted that:

All teams are a reflection of their leader, largely influenced by how that leader defines success or the scoreboard they choose to value. It requires intentional coaching and leadership to counterbalance the consistent societal push for comparison. One way to pursue excellence as a team is to be led by a person who pursues excellence first for themselves and then for the team... Each group must be given the space, void of expectation, to become the best team they can be rather simply another version of a team that came before them.²⁶

²⁵ Ryans Hawk and Brook Cupps, *The Score that Matters* (Dallas, TX: Matt Holt Books, 2024), 3.

²⁶ Hawk and Cupps, *The Score that Matters*, 6.

As a leader who must exemplify being the example of pursuing excellence, the researcher sets examples for the team of church members to follow, such as being generous in stewardship of time, talent, and treasure. This leader sets goals that will change behavior.

Herein lies the beauty of a process-oriented goal. Considering the outcome we desire; we are in the perfect position to uncover the root action that will give us the best chance to achieve what we aspire to. A process-oriented goal is a behavior. It's something we do, not something we get....By setting goals focused on the process, we expend our energy on what's in our control. Though not guaranteed, a concentration on those specific behaviors has the best potential to lead us to our desired result.²⁷

The female leadership dynamic that the researcher aims to incorporate into discipleship training and other areas of church pastoral leadership posed a challenge in many churches where both officers and members held the belief that the ideal pastor is a man. In many ways, Ardis Chapel embodied this mindset. It was not uncommon for my male trustee board chairman to advise me to *slow down* regarding the leadership measures that need to be implemented. Moreover, it was witnessed that the Men's Ministry meetings were conducting business without their leader, a female pastor, present to provide input and guidance. Consequently, this pastor sought encouragement and aimed to demonstrate excellence in leadership amid an identity crisis for many of my members.

Jemma Rondell, in her book *She Thinks Like a Boss: Leadership*, helped the reader to clearly define leadership, when she said "Leadership and management are not the same things, so it's important to be able to understand the difference. Management is more about the day-to-day operations of a business or team. Leadership, however, is ensuring that others are bought into the shared vision and that everyone is working

²⁷ Hawk and Cupps, *The Score that Matters*, 158.

together as a team to achieve those goals.”²⁸ My church is part of a district of seventeen churches called Salisbury District. As a motivational tool, the Presiding Elder speaks of the members as “Leaders Among Leaders.” Rondel makes a similar case in the comment just quoted. Confidence in one’s image as a member of a group grows as each member embraces a jointly shared vision and agrees to work toward the goal given to the group. One should feel uncomfortable accepting praise and adoration for a successful project’s completion without having done your part. Heard a story told of two friends, a mouse and an elephant, crossing a shaky bridge. After reaching the other side of the bridge, the mouse is reported to have said to the elephant, “we sure did make that bridge shake didn’t we.” When it comes to celebrating the successful work of disciple making, this pastor wanted the entire team to have played a part in making that bridge shake.

A business leadership model might be reflected in a church by simply rethinking the design of worship services. It was believed that worship services are often designed to accommodate current members rather than potential members, where friendliness should be the prevailing atmosphere. Members should then be guided by the pastor, as manager, to adopt welcoming attitudes that represent the organization known as the local church, where the salvation of souls is the top priority.

People often look to leadership when it comes to the culture of an organization and team-and they should. Leaders have a huge influence on the culture. They set the tone and decide what the team values and stands for, but it’s important to note that your culture is brought to life and created by everyone on your team...Culture is not static; it’s dynamic. You can change it by what you say. You can elevate it by what you think. You can improve it by what you share. You can

²⁸ Jemma Rondel, *She Thinks Like Boss: Leadership* (Columbia, SC: Independently Published, 2021), 36.

transform it by what you do. You can be a positive team that creates a positive culture right now.²⁹

While it may be a pastor's or lay leader's preference to view leadership as the work of an individual, such thinking greatly limits the growth and success of church members, whether in small groups or full congregational action. To avoid the necessary work of team building and ownership of responsibilities passed down from a hierarchical church, some clergy have been guilty of siding with those content with the status quo, adopting a perspective akin to joining the enemy, so to speak. Instead of this form of leadership, which advocated for the example recommended by Jensen and Martel, who state the following:

Responding to what we know about the world should never be done alone. Leadership is never a solo affair. While parts of the process are often done alone, leadership is a process that should involve a group. Leaders and followers are always working together toward positive purposeful changes...Leadership is collaborative first and foremost because of our design. It is important to keep in mind that we are 'Imago Dei'. We are created to reflect the image of God and live out our image-bearing responsibilities. God is communal in His triune nature. (Gen.1:26, NIV) God Himself exists in community. We best reflect Him when we ourselves are living and working with others towards a better world.³⁰

This concept of living and working with others toward a better world, while greatly benefiting team building and achieving mission goals, is also applicable to opportunities to witness the fact that we are all created as reflections of the image of God. How we treat those who provide services to us, such as mail and deliver package delivery personnel and those who check us out at the grocery store, speaks volumes about how we are living the Christian life. It may not seem fair, but Christians in general, and Christian

³³ Jon Gordon, *The Power of a Positive Team* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc, 2018), 17-18.

³⁰ Jensen and Martel, *Storied Leadership*, 82.

leaders specifically, are held to a higher standard than other bearers of God's image because we ought to respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit in our interactions with others. We certainly do not want to hear, “and you call yourself a Christian,” in response to our actions. The authors go on to say:

The Christian leader accepts the responsibility to act on what he knows about the world and faithfully participates in the community of image bearers. You are responsible with what you know about whatever sphere of influence you are in. Respond to the opportunities that could make the world a little better in these areas. Together, we join in the mission of God in the world and continually work to advance His Kingdom.³¹

Conclusion

This research benefited from the interdisciplinary study of business management across several areas, which I will explore in my responses to the four key questions mentioned in this chapter’s introduction. To start, how does the theory or framework influence my research in the areas that have been previously studied and reported? This pastor has become more attuned to the distinctions between leadership and management and how easily the terms have been used interchangeably. Some individuals in positions of authority, whether in the church or the business world, seek to be the ones who develop and control the project, procedures, and outcomes, often without input, ownership, or accountability from their team members. A shift in leadership is needed toward a new paradigm where leaders partner with their teams to promote growth among existing employees and facilitate the emergence of new leaders. The goal is to cultivate an environment that fosters a culture of *leaders among leaders*.

³¹ Jensen and Martel, *Storied Leadership*, 89.

When reviewing the problem, hypothesis, and solutions of the doctoral project, the researcher found that the business management model significantly enhances the actual project implementation, particularly in the area of accountability. In many areas of church work, it has been common for members to feel comfortable assigning responsibility to a select few, as if it were truly possible to remain just a pew member. It was wished that members of Ardis Chapel Church to become uncomfortable in this regard, as we all should participate in the church's primary mission: making disciples. During our annual conference each year, reports are presented regarding the number of conversions that took place in local churches. Although the pastor submits this report and only a few church members may be present, all assembled—including the Bishop, the Presiding Elders, fellow clergy, laity, and friends—will hear whether any new disciples of Christ were made that year. The researcher hoped to hear more about saved souls than the amount of money raised. The study of business management emphasized accountability, ensuring job security and progress with the sales of goods or services. Accountability must also be at the forefront of evaluating the completion of each church year.

Several new insights have emerged from the researcher's study of the business management world that can empower church members and leaders in the work of disciple-making. One insight that I will particularly embrace moving forward in the ongoing work on the project is employee engagement, or, as I would phrase it, member engagement. Matt Tunney, in his book *Inspire Greatness*, describes an engaged employee in this way: "An engaged employee is an employee who is emotionally invested in her work and willing to give discretionary effort. In other words, an engaged employee is a

motivated employee who is willing to go the extra mile to do great work and accomplish the mission.”³² Consider this definition with the word employee replaced by church member. The project aims to see, at the conclusion, engaged church members.

We often hear, whether in jest or in earnest, people describe their church not just as a good church, but as the best church there is! Rarely do they talk about the individuals who make it the best. The project’s goal will be achieved by members who are not satisfied with the status quo but by engaged individuals willing to do what is necessary to excel at making disciples. This will not be a time for false humility, as the researcher understands that hiding in the crowd allows one the opportunity to do little or nothing in service to the church. When one is involved in an important project, particularly one that appears to have little chance of success, growth potential and the ability to rise to the occasion are hallmarks of the presence of a power beyond oneself. This should come as no surprise, as the leader and team reflect the image of the one who makes all things new, Jesus Christ our Lord.

³² Matt Tunney, *Inspire Greatness* (Dallas, TX: Matt Holt, 2024), 10.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

Chapter six reflected on the purpose of this project, which developed and implemented a discipleship strategy designed to transform congregational norms. This Project Analysis chapter presents the project's creation, methodological design, implementation, and summary of learnings from the qualitative data collected. It sets the course of study during the weekly sessions with the Context Associate assisting with the project. Our focus text was *The Perfecting of the Saints* by Bishop Darryl B. Starnes, Sr.

The project theme was the development of a disciple-making focus as the number one priority of Ardis Chapel Church. While the disciple-making effort would bring new life to our local church, we emphasized that the community would benefit from a stronger, more vibrant congregation at Ardis Chapel. It was observed that children were often overshadowed by the adults who brought them to church, as if they were incapable of independent ministry. For this reason, we felt the need to create a multi-generational, all-hands-on-deck approach to disciple-making. Conversely, senior members did not have the opportunity to share their witness or evangelize due to the challenges they faced. A yearly goal was set for conversions. Sadly, when the pastor reports the number of conversions, or souls saved, during our Quarterly Conferences, which usually cover

ninety days, the answer is usually zero. We wanted this to change and set a quarterly target goal instead.

The project process began with a meeting of the members and the pastor, at which I presented the need for a renewed overarching ministry goal focused on the Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20). The project process continued with several meetings, during which class leaders were trained in disciple-making and, along with the pastor, helped to develop the multi-generational components of the Ardis Chapel Plan.

After completing the development, we implemented the process, calling upon members to report to class leaders and class leaders to report to the pastor regarding their levels of success. We evaluated the disciple-making process and made necessary improvements as we went. A measure of the success of this renewed overall ministry goal would be a positive number of souls saved and added to the ranks of disciple-makers.

The primary work of the church is to grow the Church Universal by making disciples. The members of Ardis Chapel A. M. E. Zion Church were not making disciples of the people they encountered from the surrounding community. This problem statement led to the following hypothesis: If members participate in a focus study on Christian discipleship, then they would be equipped with the tools necessary to disciple others.

The project theme was the development of a disciple-making focus as the top priority for Ardis Chapel Church. The primary goal was to ensure that disciple-making was considered the most crucial factor in the church's ministries. In my initial reading of this text, I was struck by the power of two action words: “go” and “disciple.” Several scholars’ studies emphasized the importance of clearly defining these terms for modern-

day Christians. The word “go,” while sounding like a command, is more accurately translated as “going.” Jesus’ directive is that, as you go, your work is to make disciples. Furthermore, disciples are more than students; instead, they are those who become attached to a teacher, following their lifestyle and the teachings they embrace. Thus, those who seek to disciple must be comfortable with people becoming their close associates and, in many ways, their copies. A part of our mandate as individual Christians is first, to have all reflect the character of Jesus to those we seek to disciple. Observing who Jesus is and what He is like from the perspective of the unchurched is challenging because the world holds preconceived notions about what a Christian is like.

Methodology

I was given the opportunity by Bishop Starnes to serve as the pastor of Ardis Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church. At a certain point, I observed no community outreach. There may have been several ministries, but they were all interrelated in leadership. Ardis Chapel was a family church in which members served in multiple roles, such as chairperson of one ministry, secretary of another, and treasurer of another. Add to this a generational component, in which the senior experienced leader is likely to be the parent or grandparent of a member. This discouraged any new thinking about the priorities of this local church, as the usual weekly, monthly, and yearly calendar routine had seemed satisfactory in the past.

It was not surprising to observe little change in the church’s organizational plan and regular meeting schedule, given the ingrained routines of the past. Coming from my

home church and the churches I previously pastored, I knew that it would be a better path forward if Ardis Chapel placed disciple-making at the top of their priority list.

A change of heart, mind, and spirit would be needed for this church to break out of the outdated mold that many small membership churches find themselves in. Having previously been assigned to read and apply the information in the book *For the Perfecting of the Saints* by Bishop Darryl B. Starnes, Sr., I recognized that Ardis Chapel had the beginnings of a turnaround process but lacked the follow-through that leadership should provide. This led me to address the issue through a future doctoral project. I applied to the United Theological Seminary of Dayton, Ohio. I was accepted as a student at United Theological Seminary and began the process that led to the approval of this doctoral project.

The project was presented to the members of Ardis Chapel by my contextual associate, and each member who wished to participate was provided with the date and time of the project. Those who volunteered for the project included trustees, stewards, class leaders, missionaries, and Christian educators. The Class leaders were previously introduced to our primary reference material, *For the Perfecting of the Saints*. They were given instructions by their previous pastor and the Leader of Leaders. Most of the participants were related and grew up in Ardis Chapel. One would consider this to be a family church. Quite often, in group discussions, some participants would mention how they were raised or taught certain basic things about the A.M.E. Zion Church and would become very defensive about any viewpoint that questioned the correctness of what former pastors and lay leadership had taught them. This created an atmosphere that required sensitivity during implementation.

We needed to create a process that accomplishes several goals and ensures that disciple-making is the primary focus of the church's ministries. Whereas previously, disciple-making may have been seen as the work of the ministers, this new approach would require the participation of the entire membership. It is important to develop a vision or mission statement that targets the community, one that will make Ardis Chapel a church with new life that benefits the surrounding community.

We noted that children are often overshadowed by the adults who bring them to church, as if they are incapable of independent ministry. At the other end of the spectrum, our senior members needed the opportunity to share their witness and experience in evangelization, even with the challenges that age brings. Sadly, when the pastor reports the number of conversions, or souls saved, during our quarterly conferences, the answer is usually zero. We wanted to change this and set a quarterly target goal instead.

We began our project with a meeting of the members and the pastor. I presented the need for a renewed focus of ministry on the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20). I emphasized that disciple-making is the reason we are here as a church, and the process should be approached with several agreed-upon steps to be successful. The project's preliminary steps of the project began with calling class leaders to several meetings, where they were trained in disciple-making. They were also directed to train their class members, modeling for them the small-group evangelism advocated by Methodism's founder, John Wesley.¹ I emphasized that the new disciple-making process would become the new normal. Maintenance ministry or maintaining the status quo would no longer be a reason to celebrate at the end of the conference year.

¹ Starnes, *For the Perfecting of the Saints*, 89.

The project was scheduled to take place over six weeks with afternoon and evening participants. For the entire seven weeks, I served as the primary facilitator, assisted by a secondary facilitator. The sessions lasted approximately an hour. The participants were assigned readings from six chapters of the book *For the Perfecting of the Saints*, which they discussed in response to assigned questions.

The seven sessions were held in person (afternoon) and/or virtually (evening) at Ardis Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church. I selected my contextual associate because she had strong leadership skills and was well-respected at the church. She would be able to keep things confidential throughout the project. My professional associates received a packet of information that included the materials the participants would be using. The contextual associate was there to provide feedback, collect participants' papers, and offer other support as needed. The secondary facilitator assisted me with questioning and encouraging responses from the participants. This facilitator also noted comments later added to written responses for questions submitted to participants.

There were nine participants in this project. The final project used a qualitative research method. All participants completed consent forms and pre- and post-survey questions and participated in discussions with varying levels of input. The participants' responses to the session questions were noted and preserved, along with their submitted answers, to form a body of reference materials for the researcher to use later in documentation. It became apparent early in the session process that, while participants had completed their reading assignments, they were not all comfortable responding to the discussions regarding the questions and opinions raised by one another. This required that the secondary facilitator and I model appropriate responses to move the session forward.

Implementation

The project was implemented in person with participants from the Ardis Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church and a second church in our district. The agenda for each session did not vary in presentation except for one video presentation by the Right Rev. Darryl B. Starnes, Sr., the author of *For the Perfecting of the Saints*. The session handouts, pre-survey questions, and consent forms were distributed before session one. All participants indicated that they were comfortable participating in the session and ready to proceed.

Session One – Wednesday, July 9, 2025

In Session One, we engaged with the questions from the first assigned readings. Our group discussion covered what sainthood is and how it can be applied to any Christian, not just those of an unusually gifted nature or those in service. It became clear that many participants were uncomfortable with the idea of calling themselves saints, preferring to use the term for Christians of higher virtue and standards. The discussion of perfecting the saints helped to address these issues when it was agreed that all Christians, or all saints, are in a process of growth and change, characterized by overcoming weaknesses and putting away childish ways. One participant dealt with overcoming weaknesses by “not caving to others when they say ‘you ain’t perfect.’” As the participants summed it up, putting away childish ways meant avoiding selfishness, self-centeredness, and self-interest. We agreed that saints should stop seeing only ways for themselves to be the beneficiary. Achieving these goals helps a saint to develop character and reach the full potential as a child of God.

Session One evening group participants also had much to say about defining the word saint and the phrase “perfecting the Saints.” One participant believed that a saint was a deceased person whose life was so exceptional that they had been canonized. The definition was clarified, explaining that perfected sainthood is achieved with God's help while one is living, and that a saint is a synonym for a Christian. This explanation clarified that the Roman Catholic model of sainthood differs from that of the Protestant Church. Some participants failed to see themselves as works in progress, believing they had already arrived at being the best Christian they could be. Much of this position was characterized by defensive language about their upbringing and prior instruction. A reluctance to share their weakness and a concern about public speaking ability were also evident. There was agreement that all Christians should be faithful to the means of grace, the study of the Word daily, and live lives characterized by love and kindness.

Session Two – Wednesday, July 19, 2025

In Session Two, we addressed two questions presented to the participants; the first was: How do a church’s weekly activities define the mission of the church? In citing reference material from their assigned reading, it was true that much of what we do during the course of the church year involves activities such as fundraising, sponsoring annual observances, meeting connectional budgetary goals, and providing goods to the poor and needy.

Participants expressed concern regarding activities not specific to our mission. Concerns included how to pay for necessary assessments. Others were concerned about the fiscal obligation to the A.M.E. Zion Church. Other participants countered this

viewpoint, arguing that if members paid their tithes and offerings regularly, there would be no need for such a focus on fundraising activities to support connectional projects.

Few, if any, members of Ardis Chapel could articulate the church's mission mandate. We concluded that the mandate must come from Jesus Christ, for no one else has the right to give marching orders to the church. The phrase "marching orders" is appropriate. The mission of the church has been described by church historians and biblical scholars in military terms, such as the Great Commission, which establishes Jesus Christ as our commander-in-chief, as noted in Matthew 28:18. He orders his church to make disciples.

We continued our discussion by considering the second question: What immediate changes could be made to better reflect the church's desired mission? To return disciple-making to its central focus, the church must ensure that every ministry, leader, and member affirms that the Great Commission is the work of every local church. But how do we do it? Participants responded in several ways, stating that they do not know how to make disciples, but that they can prepare and go out weekly. Some newly introduced ideas included door hangers and an extra Sunday bulletin to promote the church's mission. We concluded that proper emphasis should be placed on evangelistic efforts through worship services, Christian education, missionary activities, Bible Study, preparatory membership training, and similar initiatives.

Making disciples should never take a back seat to community service projects, such as back-to-school supply giveaways, free Thanksgiving meals, and political action efforts, such as Souls to the Polls. Our session concluded with a three-word response to Question Three—What is Christ's mandate for the church? — "to make disciples!"

Session Three – Wednesday, July 19, 2025

On August 6, 2025, the project continued with Session Three, which addressed the question, “Who was John Wesley?” The participants were familiar with Wesley as the founder of Methodism. The facilitator emphasized Wesley’s biblical foundation, noting that one of his favorite phrases was “I am a man of one book.” Certainly, the people called Methodists must conform to the truths found in the Bible. Further discussion led to Question Two: What is the nature of holiness or sanctification? “Our text told us that holiness sanctification is an ongoing process in the life of a Christian believer, something not only to be pursued, but to be spread,”² Wesley called this scriptural holiness. The facilitator emphasized that there is no holiness without social holiness; that is, how we treat our brothers and sisters in the world is as important as how we treat God in heaven. Continuing this line of thought to its logical conclusion, we discussed how problematic it is for churches to emphasize ministries that address physical needs while failing to keep disciple-making at the forefront.

Our discussion also centered on how some Christians seem to have to wear so many hats in the life of the church. Additionally, we discussed how some Christians individually must put on the Christian education hat, the missionary hat, and the trustee/steward hats, while some Christians hardly ever wear one hat. Everyone in the church ought to wear a hat labeled “pursuing scriptural holiness.” Our session concluded with the thought that small group discipleship precedes wearing that hat.

² Starnes, *For the Perfecting of the Saints*, 36.

Session Four – Wednesday, August 13, 2025

In Session Four, we discussed the assigned question: What role do small groups play in making disciples? Our text stated that sustained spiritual growth, character development, and dynamic personal evangelism occur within small-group ministry. Our participants shared their thoughts in response to this question. A participant compared small group discipleship to Alcoholics Anonymous, where you realize you are not in the struggle by yourself, and like support groups for veterans who are sick. One participant acknowledged that group members remain together and relate to one another. Another said that the class leader assigned to a new member should be someone who will help and support them as they grow. The sharing experience, which took place in small groups, allowed participants to feel at ease and to speak freely about the changes in their lives brought about by Jesus Christ and the opportunities now available to disciple friends and relatives.

A participant reported that a spiritual mentor who knew the church taught her the catechism, which she found rewarding and enriching. Such experiences should encourage the continued functioning of our class-leader system in Zion Methodism. Our text also told us that John Wesley developed “the means of grace,”³ which became a permanent part of the General Rules of the Methodist Book of Discipline.

Session Five – Wednesday, August 20, 2025

In Session Five, participants responded to three assigned questions; the first was: What role does proclaiming the Gospel play in disciple-making? “Our text told us that the

³ Starnes, *For the Perfecting of the Saints*, 42.

Gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God unto salvation.”⁴ One must hear and respond to its message to have true repentance and genuine faith. We were also told that Christians ought to carry themselves as Christ’s Ambassadors to the world. While we live in this world, we should see ourselves as strangers here, sojourners, foreigners, and aliens, for our citizenship is in heaven. The facilitator provided further details on what it means to be an ambassador, the authorized representative of one country to another. An ambassador speaks the language and observes the customs of the country of residence, carrying out the duties assigned by the king, queen, or president of the home country. Participants were challenged to see themselves in this ambassador role, understanding that a transformed life is evidence of our authority as Christ ambassadors. Our participants responded by saying people should be able to see the change in us if we are ambassadors for Christ.

Question Two asked, what differences might we find in the approach of clergy and laity to the disciple-making process? In seeking to answer this question, the facilitator emphasized that proclamation gives focus to our ambassadorship. Both clergy and lay people share a common message about what God wants the world to know. A participant responded that the goal remains the same, whereas the procedures (conversations and our sharing with one another) differ.

Enlarging upon what should be proclaimed, three emphases were given: 1. God wants the world to know that he is offering salvation, not condemnation 2. God wants the world to know that he wants a relationship, not religion, and 3. God wants the world to know that he is imputing righteousness, not trespasses. Be it clergy teaching and

⁴ Starnes, *For the Perfecting of the Saints*, 61.

preaching or laity witnessing and testifying, Christ's ambassadors show forth and proclaim the Gospel of salvation through the example of changed lives.

The third question that concluded Session Five is as follows:—Can you give examples of people doing things that appear to be of the church but are actually not of the church?—The question was presented with the following cautionary statement: Do not name the church or the person, especially Ardis Chapel and members, in order to protect confidentiality. Facilitators suggested the following statement as an opening answer to the question: A good way to start this answer is “In a certain church, a minister or a member did thus and so...” Among the responses to this humorous question were the following:

An announcement in the church bulletin reported another church's pastor's activities, while information from the local church's pastor was left out. After regular announcements have been made, members and visitors may make additional announcements of secular events. A local church sponsors a dance for young members and friends, only to find that their music, dress, and dancing were not appropriate for the church. These examples challenged us to embrace our role as Christ's ambassadors, knowing that this world and heaven cannot both be our home.

Session Six – Wednesday, August 27, 2025

Session Six addressed the assigned questions, the first of which was: Why must current members of the church adopt a new way of thinking to enable the discipling of new members? Being born again enables Christians to understand spiritual truths that were previously beyond their comprehension. The Christian life ought to be one of

growth and development. Hence, the one seeking to disciple grows in their spiritual understanding and becomes more equipped to carry out the disciple-making process day by day. Our text told us that “being born again is no guarantee that we are thinking correctly. In the years before our conversion, we formed many wrong ways of thinking about the realities of life. In most cases, this wrong thinking becomes ingrained in us and greatly impacts our worldview.”⁵

Our group discussion provided evidence that some participants have retained incorrect teaching, invoking defenses such as “that is how I was raised.” When we added to this the need to adopt a new way of thinking, the possibility that previous pastors and class leaders may have been incorrect in their instruction of new members, defensive language was part of the response. Among the responses to this question were the following: “Being born again increases our understanding.” “You knew it, but you did not gravitate to it.” “Some people think that people can ‘good’ their way into Heaven.” “I am making all this money, and I am broke at the end of the week. Once I began to tithe, things became easier by the grace of God.” When we clarify how people go to Heaven by accepting Christ as their Lord and Savior, we also need to emphasize that the ongoing study of God’s Word can change the way we think.

A vital part of developing a new way of thinking to aid in the disciple-making process was the preaching ministry. Bishop Starnes’s book informed us “that preaching is not only God’s plan for the salvation of those who are lost; it is also God’s plan for the spiritual growth and faith development of those who are saved.”⁶ We discussed the

⁵ Starnes, *For the Perfecting of the Saints*, 79.

⁶ Starnes, *For the Perfecting of the Saints*, 83.

benefits of attending Sunday morning worship and how preaching and teaching can help current members learn and exhibit new ways of thinking and acting.

Question Two of this session asked: Why must new believers in Christ embrace a new way of thinking individually? While it is true that we are proclaiming Christ and not ourselves, it is also true that proclamation without supporting evidence means no conviction. As we move toward perfection in Christ, we should show a genuine and progressive transformation. Our co-facilitator shared the classic poem “Sermons We See” by Edgar Guest. In response to this poem, participants shared the following comments: We should be able to see and hear the sermon in the lives of fellow Christians. We were out in the world, and God reeled me back in. Another vital part of developing a new way of thinking for disciple-making was the daily reading and study of the Word of God. Bishop Starnes told us that, “as dynamic as preaching can be, and as impactful as teaching can be, I am convinced that nothing renews our minds and alters our thinking like daily bible reading and study.”⁷ Our co-facilitator has compared this daily routine to getting ready for your final exam. One of the participants further described personal daily study of the word of God as extracurricular studies, saying that you will come to your own understandings.

Session Seven – Wednesday, September 3, 2025

Our final session addressed two previously assigned questions. The first question was, in what ways can we say that the class meeting is a vital fellowship within the church family? Standard Methodist practice assigns a new member to a Class and a Class

⁷ Starnes, *The Perfecting of the Saints*, 87.

Leader. The Class Leader gives sub-pastoral oversight to his/her members by holding regularly scheduled Class Meetings. These meetings are designed to foster fellowship in which spiritual growth takes place. The co-facilitator emphasized, while leading the discussion, that while increasing biblical knowledge is beneficial, Class Meetings are not Bible Study. A participant elaborated, stating that the Class Leader must know it's not a Bible Study or a prayer meeting. It is a time for personal sharing, a safe place where what you say is protected. Another participant noted that the Class Meeting is less formal than Sunday School or Sunday-morning worship. They also suggested that Sunday take the place of a class meeting, and Sunday School is long enough for extensive sharing. We concluded the discussion of this question by agreeing that the single most important purpose for Class Meetings is disciple-making. Thus, the Class Leader and members of the Class put into practice the truths they have learned from sermons, lessons, and personal study of God's Word with this goal in mind: learning how to disciple new converts.

Our second question was: What is your response to the vital components of a class meeting: gathering, sharing, praying, and sending? The co-facilitator informed participants that pastors in our district hold a monthly gathering modeled after the Class Meeting component. Their sharing must be brief, and they are encouraged to write it in advance. With this example in mind, our group discussion revealed the following responses:

1. "It is important to release the stress you are going through and encourage one another."

2. “The meeting can be opened with a sharing period, including a brief song, a brief scripture, and a brief prayer.”
3. “We are all encouraged to share because the Class Meeting is not a place for spectators.”
4. “Looking at the six question prompts, one is prompted to evaluate one's life.”
5. “The sending prayer is a focus on what happened in the meeting.”
6. “It is a covering as we go out into this mean world.”

After further instructions about our concluding activities, the session ended with a sending prayer.

Summary of Learnings

This project addressed the fact that members of Ardis Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church were not making disciples among the people they encountered in the surrounding community. I proposed a series of sessions that would present the rationale and methodology of discipleship training, along with the desired outcomes. This was a six-week series of sessions using the book *For the Perfecting of the Saints* by Bishop Darryl Brewster Starnes, Sr. Data collection included pre- and post-survey questions, group discussions, and personal interviews. I concluded that if the members participated in a focused study on Christian discipleship, then they would be equipped with the tools necessary to disciple others.

This project consisted of the pastor as the instructor, professional associates, and members as participants. Announcements and flyers for the project to solicit potential participants were distributed. Participants were asked to sign a consent form.

Bishop Darryl Brewster Starnes, Sr., Senior Bishop and Presiding Prelate of the Piedmont Episcopal District of the A.M.E. Zion Church, was among the associates. Dr. Grant Harrison, Jr., the Presiding Elder of the Salisbury District, A.M.E. Zion Church, facilitated the group discussions. Our focus centered on the proper understanding and use of the Class Meeting as the mechanism for disciple-making, as well as the role of the Class Leader. A series of questions and answers would be presented, followed by the group discussion.

Pre-Survey Questions

1. What would you say is “the mission of the church?”

“The mission of the church is the reason the church exists.”

2. If Christianity were a crime, would there be enough evidence against you to find you “guilty as charged?”

“We need to look at the worldly standards for being a Christian.”

3. How important is the experience of growing in grace and spiritual transformation to the new member of a church?

“The movement from a new member to an experienced one is a unique process.”

4. Are all members of the church to be holy, or only those set apart for special service, such as ministers and deaconesses?

“We must look at holiness as a defining term for Christians.”

5. How can we define the word “saint?”

“Is sainthood a standard for being a Christian, or is it an option?”

6. If one has accepted Christ as Lord and Savior and joined a local church, how is that person's previous behavior and thinking changed to be more like Jesus?
 "This is the process of becoming a Christian."
7. How do the daily or weekly activities of your church inform the unsaved about what the mission of the church really is?
 "The activities of your church is the witness of your church to the unsaved."
8. Is there room for being an individual while being transformed into the image of Christ? Are all Christians supposed to be alike?
 "We are called to be one in Christ yet remain oneself as an individual."
9. Do you read/study your Bible daily? Are you a part of regular Bible Study activities in a small group or your local church at large?
 "We must look at the importance of Bible Study as a regular practice."
10. Do we get better, in service to the Lord, as we get older? Are we continuing to grow in usefulness, or do we reach a peak at some point?
 "This reflects the process of maturing as a Christian."
11. Do you feel prepared to share salvation with someone you may meet, as God gives you the opportunity?
 "Sharing the faith is an important part of being a Christian."

*Group Discussion – Participants' Responses and Discussion:
 Session One (Morning Group) – July 9, 2025*

Question One asked: What is a saint?

Participants responded:

"One in Christ Jesus, not only a special nation, but all people can be saints."

Question Two asked: What does it mean to “perfect the saints”?

Participants responded:

- Overcoming weaknesses, lateness,.
- Gossip and not caving to others when they say ‘You ain’t perfect.
- Putting away childish ways; avoid being grown-up ‘babes in Christ’ raising children who are ‘perfecting saints.’
- Avoid selfishness.
- Self-centeredness.
- Self-interest, seeing only ways for self to be the beneficiary!
- Pray for others first and call their names.
- Keep prayer requests confidential.
- Develop character: Know who you are!
- Avoid having one foot in the church and the other foot in the world. (double mind).
- Be a ‘drawing card’ for the church, to grow the church.
- Be a ‘community-driven’ church.
- Ask how can we improve, or work toward ‘perfection?’

Session One (Evening Group) – July 9, 2025

Question One asked: What is a saint?

Participants responded:

- “A dead person who achieves sainthood?”

The instructor clarified the definition, explaining that perfected sainthood is achieved with God's help while one is living.

Question Two asked: What does it mean to perfect the saints?

Participants responded,

- Saints are a work in progress, not an immediate accomplishment. Emphasis was placed on the journey to becoming a better saint. Perfection is an earthly journey or goal.
- Overcoming weaknesses and flaws.
- God must work on us like a sculptor, smoothing out the rough, uneven surfaces; Christian perfection is a goal accomplished in this life.
- We ought to be striving toward perfection.
- Willingness to share weaknesses.

- Concerns about public speaking ability were also shared. Participants continued with the development of character.
- Being Christ-like and disciplined.
- Being faithful to ‘the means of grace.
- Reading the Bible daily.
- Being committed to the Christian life.
- Being loving and kind.
- We tend to judge people unfairly.
- The song’s lyrics, “Please Be Patient with Me,” were shared and discussed.

Session Two (Morning Group) – July 19, 2025

In response to Question One, participants said: “It falls on leadership.” “How are you gonna pay the assessments?” “You have to pay too much in the AME Zion Church.” “Pay your tithes and offerings.” In response to Question Two, participants said: “We don’t know how to make disciples.” “Prepare and go out weekly.” “Use door hangers and extra Sunday bulletins to promote the church mission.” “Distribute snacks in the hospital lounge with church contact information on them.” “Know yourself training!” In response to Question Three, participants responded: “Make Disciples!”

Session Three (Morning Group) – August 6, 2025

In response to Question One, participants stated: “Founder of Methodism. He wanted to see a change in the daily practices of the church.” “A man of one book.” “Do things by ‘The Book.’” “The Bible is a book of 66 books.” “What do you do with old Bibles?” “What’s on your spiritual bookcase shelves?” “Is there a need for a ‘book discard’ in your spiritual or physical library?” In response to Question Two, participants stated: “One Book is where holiness and sanctification come in.” “Somebody got to do it.” “Wearing many hats is not always necessary.” “It causes a church not to grow.”

“Don’t let the head get bigger than the hat.” “Take out time to know more about God and His Word.”

Session Four (Morning Group) – August 13, 2025

Question One asked: What role do small groups play in making disciples? In response, participants said: “Group members stay together, relating to each other ... The older generation is not seeing the younger generation's accomplishments.” “People’s seats vs. open seating” “Not at our church!” “Role of 'worship leaders' vs. Traditional order of worship service participation” ... “Worship is spontaneous vs. an order of worship”.... “Class leader assignment of a new member?” “It ought to be someone who will help and let them grow!”

Question Two asked: Have you come to a new relationship with Christ by the means of a friend or relative? Participants responded: “Learning the catechism ... being involved with a spiritual mentor that knows the church and her structure (travels the church)” ... “Because my husband said, 'That woman’s so mean ain’t nobody going to bother her' (‘meanness’ associated with being small physically). My sister agreed! This led to my conversion after serious soul-searching!”

Session Four (Evening Group) – August 13, 2025

In response to Question One, participants said: “Feel more comfortable sharing the Gospel and gain what you need to make disciples.” “Be able to share better with others!” “Comparable to AA, where you realize you are not in this by yourself!” “Like a support group for veterans who are sick.” In response to Question Two, the question was

asked, “Are you saved?” In response, participants noted, “If you don’t know Him, you’re lost!”

Session Five (Morning Group) – August 20, 2025

Question One asked: What role does proclaiming the Gospel have in disciple-making? Participants answered: “Guys, I used to hang out with, wanted to know why I had changed ... It was rough in the beginning, but the Lord worked it out!” ... “Some church-going folks could be described as ‘going to church and being mean as a snake.’ They were attending members but unchanged as to salvation and conversion.” “Be ‘present’ to people you’re seeking to share the Gospel with.”

Question Two asked: What differences might we find in the approach of clergy and laity to the disciple-making process? Participants responded: “Goal is the same, while procedures (conversations, people sharing with each other) differ.”

Question Three asked: Can you give examples of people doing things that appear to be of the church, but are actually not of the church? Participants said: “An announcement placed in the church bulletin about another church’s pastor and activity, while information from the local church pastor was left out ... The member’s response when corrected!”

Session Five (Evening Group) – August 20, 2025

In response to Question One, participants said: “People should have an inner heart change.” ... “An ambassador becomes a figurehead!” “People ought to be able to see the change in us, if we are ambassadors for Christ!”

In response to Question Two, participants responded: “Both should use God’s Word.” “Laity might be accused of ‘preaching without a license!’” Participants responded to Question Three by saying, “Bring it to the attention of the pastor.”

Session Six (Morning Group) – August 27, 2025

Question One asked: Why must current members of the church adopt a new way of thinking to enable the discipling of new members? Participants responded: “Being born again increases our understanding.” “You knew it, but you didn’t gravitate to it.” “I’m making all this money, and I’m broke at the end of the week,” a statement that reflects status before the participant began to tithe. “Handling money, being honest, living with integrity, became easier after the grace of God.” “Some people think that people can ‘good’ their way into Heaven!” “Paying their general claims isn’t supporting the local church, though some think so. How can this represent ‘being a member in good standing,’ when you aren’t paying your tithes and offerings and regularly attending the means of grace?” “What do we receive from preaching and teaching?” “In times past, if you weren’t whooping and hollering, you weren’t preaching.”

Question Two asked: Why must new believers in Christ embrace a new way of thinking individually? Participants responded: “To grow spiritually,” “See a sermon vs. hearing one.” They also responded to being dishonest: “When I tried to be dishonest with my taxes, they audited me.” “Scamming people;” “Faking voices using AI;” “Your information has been compromised.” “(1960s comic hero, Magnus Robot Fighter, The Jetsons, Sci-Fi has become reality.” “Daily study of the Word (Daily Bread, Sunday School Daily scriptures) helps me.”

Session Six (Evening Responses) – August 27, 2025

In response to Question One, participants noted: “Many people, the saved and the lost, originally thought, ‘People who did good things are going to heaven.’” “You have to be responsible for your reactions to what you ‘see and hear’ through God’s Word. ‘You run with dogs, you get fleas!’”

For Question Two, in response to the reading of the poem, “Sermons We See,” by Edgar Guest, participants said, “We should be able to ‘see and hear the sermon’ in the lives of fellow Christians.” “We were out in the world, and God reeled me back in.” “Extracurricular studies—personal daily study of the Word of God, and then, preaching, Sunday School, and Bible Study—could be referred to as “Curricular studies.” “Through daily personal study of God’s word;” “You will come to your own understanding.”

Session Seven (Morning Group) – September 3, 2025

Question One asked: In what ways can we say that the class meeting is a vital fellowship within the church Family? Participants answered, “The class leader has to know it’s not a Bible study or a Prayer Meeting. It is a time for personal sharing. You get the opportunity, as a class leader, to respond to their needs, to open up and share “Small groups, not over fifteen people;” “A safe place, what you say is protected;” “Class membership is more intimate than church membership.” “Classes that taught Zion Methodism were part of the year’s instruction.”

Question Two asked: What is your response to the vital components of a class meeting: gathering, sharing, praying, and sending? “In the hearing, the pastors have to

respond to the six questions ... their sharing has to stay within this context” (description of sharing from a pastor’s fellowship patterned after a class meeting). “One size doesn’t fit all ... are we ready to do ‘this and that?’” “Are people willing to sacrifice?” “Family role models seen and applied in Christian living.” “Sending Prayer is a ‘focused prayer about what happened in the meeting.’” “Closing prayer as a covering, going out into this ‘mean world’;” “Sending prayer is like a Benediction.” “We do need to be covered.” “A little girl, noticing a minister leaving church before the Benediction, said to her father, ‘He’s a minister. He can Benedict himself!’”

Session Seven (Evening Group) – September 3, 2025

In response to Question One, participants said: “Class meeting is less formal than Sunday School or Sunday Morning Worship.” “Sunday School is taking the place of Class Meetings” (comment in reference to the amount of personal sharing that happens in Sunday School). “A lot of times we experience class meetings in Sunday School, where we share experiences of the week ... People’s testimony is a benefit.” “Sunday School isn’t long enough for extensive sharing.”

In response to Question Two, participants said, “A new idea ... many moons ago, class meetings were like this.” “It is important to release the stress you are going through and encourage one another.” The six questions were asked of a participant, and she responded, as a demonstration of how this should be done: “Church Women United (a statewide ministry) meetings end with a ‘sending prayer.’”

In reflecting on the group discussion component of the project, I found that the morning session participants were more engaged in answering questions and seeking to

learn from each other. The evening session participants, for the most part, had very little to contribute to the discussion, with the experience primarily of one or two people sharing. The difference between the sessions might also have reflected the age and experience of the participants, with the older retired members in the morning and the younger, less comfortable members in the evening.

Post-Survey Questions

Question One asked: Do you see the mission of the church differently after the survey has been completed? If so, how?

- Participant One said, “Yes, the mission is to save as many souls as possible.”
- Participant Two said, “I can see hope for the true church of God. Knowing that God’s word will never fail. Why should I see the truth differently?”
- Participant Three said, “I don’t see the mission differently, but how it can be implemented better.”
- Participant Four simply answered, “No.”
- Participant Five also said, “No, the mission of the church is still the same. The church, which are the people and not the building, is to help souls and encourage and help those saved to grow closer to God.”
- Participant Six said, “No, the mission of the church has always been the same since Christ, to make disciples. We, the disciples of Christ, just need to get on board.”
- Participant Seven said, “Somewhat ... I always understood our true work is outside of the building and bringing others to Christ. This series just reinforces that feeling/mandate from Jesus.”
- Participant Eight said, “The mission of the church is to win souls for Christ and make disciples. I see various ways to build the church community-wide. It starts with oneself personal walk with Christ. One must be in a relationship with Jesus Christ.”

The second question was: Has the world sought to define the church in your experience? How have these sessions helped you define “the church” in a Biblically sound manner?

- Participant One responded, “The world will mislead you. But God’s word will last forever.”
- Participant Two said, “Yes. You can learn something from anyone’s writing, whether you apply it to your life is what matters.”
- Participant Three said, “The church seems to take on the ways of the world, rather than the world taking on the ways of the church. The church should show the love of God by loving mankind.”
- Participant Four said, “The world is viewing a sermon or attending a visual sermon as church. You are able to do everything as if you were in the actual building with other believers.”
- Participant Five said, “Maybe some people don’t feel like it’s necessary to go to church and fellowship with one another, because church services can be viewed at home on TV. Church is necessary for people to fellowship and hear the Word of the Lord. Even if they read the Bible daily.”
- Participant Six said, “Yes, the world has sought to define the church. The world wants the church to accept anything and everything that’s in the world so they can feel comfortable. The church is not a playground where you come to feel good for an hour, but a sacred ground where you truly want to change your life and accept Christ as your Savior, but you have to want this change in your heart first.”
- Participant Seven said, “Today, the world is very cruel, and it's amazing how folks do not care to speak about God, Jesus, or Christianity. The world constantly interjects questions or reasons that object to Jesus’ teachings. It is sad. The church is the Bride of Christ!!! Christ will return to claim the Bride, whether folks believe it or not.”
- Participant Eight said, “The world has sought to define ‘the church’ in my experience by rewriting the Word in various versions. Certain words and meanings have been minted from the original version to reach different generations and alter the text to modern-day readers. These sessions have helped me to delve more into the Word of God and how Jesus called his disciples to follow him. It has made me want to know more and more about being a follower of Christ.”

Question three asked: How are you applying the concept of growing in grace to yourself and other Christians you interact with?

- Participant One said, “studying the Word daily and sharing what I have learned.”
- Participant Two responded, “As stated in the session, you grow and move on, and as you meet those who are on your level. You know that hope in Christ is sufficient.”
- Participant Three said, “I am growing in grace and learning to extend more grace to others.”
- Participant Four responded, “I believe I grow in grace by reading and studying the Word daily. It helps with everyday situations.”
- Participant Five said, “To me, ‘Growing in Grace’ is becoming closer to God by reading His Word and learning to treat others as you want to be treated.”
- Participant Six reflected, “Growing in grace to me means turning from your old way of life and accepting Christ’s way as you interact with your family, friends, and neighbors. Someone prayed for me when I was in the world, and God gave me grace, which means I should extend that grace to others as they make the change in life to accept Christ’s will and way, love and kindness.”
- Participant Seven emphasized, “We have to forgive our past sins, also as we forgive others, so that those sins have affected us. I think most folks carry a number of past sins and regrets they committed or others committed against them. We only have today, only this very moment, to do our very best and make any changes necessary. Our God is waiting on us to make the right decision.”
- Participant Eight said, “I feel a change in how I no longer desire to be around certain conversations, negative talk atmospheres, and people. I desire to be focused on goodness, positive energy, uplifting, loving, and showing kindness to others by my presence and words. I’m growing in grace people have shared with me over the years and recently.”

The fourth question asked: In what ways did your definition of “sainthood” or “holiness” change?

- Participant One said, “Sometimes it feels like I’m in the presence of God.”

- Participant Two said, “In my life, it has not changed. Once you have Christ in your life, those words should never change.”
- Participant Three said, “As we grow in Christ, ‘sainthood,’ or holiness, we should also grow because this is a continuous process.”
- Participant Four responded, “I learned sainthood is a personal recognition of a person who has been given that title for their holy way or exemplary life. Holiness is being set apart for God, living according to His Word.”
- Participant Six said, “My definition of sainthood and holiness has not changed. Holiness and sainthood mean being set apart to be used by God. Once again, we, the disciples, just need to get on board and serve the Lord and do the work that he has set before us to do. If we have accepted salvation and Christ as our Savior, this should be hard.”
- Participant Seven said, “Before this class, I would have never considered myself a saint. I think in our Christian walk, we do a lot of finger-pointing and are always ready to display someone else’s sins. We have no problem pointing out others' sins, and that practice reciprocates back to us. We can’t see ourselves as holy or saints.”
- Participant Eight said, “My definition of ‘sainthood’ has changed with regard to what the scripture says. Saints are set apart as holy unto God. If we live according to god’s word and believe in Jesus Christ, we can be declared holy by living as Christ lived. He must live in us. We must display Christ in-dwelling in us.”

Do you see any changes in your church’s daily or weekly activities that will inform the unsaved of the church’s mission was the fifth question asked.

- Participant One said, “I see some changes, but we have a lot of work to do.” Participant Two simply said, “Yes!”
- Participant Three said, “We need some improvement in this area.”
- Participant Four said, “We have different activities in an effort to reach the unsaved but daily.”
- Participant Five said, “The function of the church that will help the unsaved see that we are serious about the mission of our church is to become involved during Bible Study and Sunday School. Also, to meet and fellowship with the members of Ardis.”

- Participant Six said, “Yes, the church is reaching out to the community in many ways to show love and support for the upbuilding of God’s kingdom.”
- Participant Seven said, “‘Being a Light in the community, Leading Others to Christ’ is a mighty mission statement. We must first appeal to our community we serve by defining our community. Our church should continue to have weekly or daily activities that will uplift this community.”
- Participant Eight said, “There have been significant changes in our church. There has been a reawakening of the next generation. They are excited about using the God-given gifts. They are reaching out to the lost and unchurched by their gifts of technology. The young adults have opened their gifts via Facebook, Instagram, and small group activities. The church livestreams services to reach the masses. We have a Book study as well as a Bible study on a weekly basis. They volunteer in serving and interacting with the homeless. They serve meals along with our youth. The church sponsors trips for those who may not have the opportunity to leave their communities. We reach out to serve the whole family with Senior Fellowship, Children’s Church, Vacation Bible School, visitation, and calls to the sick and shut-in.”

Question six asked: How can you express your individuality and still represent being transformed into the image of Christ?

- Participant One responded that they can express individuality “by speaking on things I know God has done for me and live the best I know.”
- Participant Two said individuality is expressed in “my everyday action wherever I am.”
- Participant Three said, “We are of the world, but we should still transform into the image of Christ.”
- Participant Four said, “Once a person is saved, others will see the change. A person does not act the same once saved.”
- Participant Five noted, “Everyone is different and responds differently to different situations.”
- Participant Six said, “I express myself as a person by the way that I dress, act, and carry myself. Not always perfect, but daily growing. Showing love and compassion for all that I come in contact with.”

- Participant Seven said individuality is expressed when [I] “lean on my spiritual gifts and know that is part of the Jesus in me; We are not clones, but very different, and Christ loves us all.”
- Participant Eight said, “The way I express my individuality is to keep my mind focused on Christ. I try to do good at all times and pray in every situation, listen to my inner voice when something doesn’t feel right.”

Question Seven asked how this series of sessions affected your personal Bible

Study and what you have observed of the other members of your church?

- Participant One said, “I’ve enjoyed every minute of it. But everyone has their own opinion.”
- Participant Two said, “Hopefully it has helped us all.”
- Participant Three said, “I spend thirty-five to forty-five minutes, first thing every day, for personal study.”
- Participant Four said the series “helped me to be more intentional with daily reading of the Bible.”
- Participant Five said, “I have been reading the Bible when I didn’t think I had time.”
- Participant Six said, “After these sessions, I want to be more disciplined in studying the Bible and continue to be a part of small groups. I want to be a better disciple, person, and Christian.”
- Participant Seven said, “Most of our congregation wear many hats, which is the fun part of having a small congregation. This can also be a challenge if people feel overwhelmed or not working in their God-given gifts.”
- Participant Eight said, “During these series of sessions, my prayer life has transformed. I study more and meditate on what the Word is speaking to me. My desire is to be more in tune with my own walk with Christ. God has revealed some things and some people and their intentions towards others.”

The eighth question asked are you more comfortable with the idea of sharing salvation with someone God may send your way?

- Participant One said, “Absolutely, and I never try to push anything on them, but give them facts.”

- Participant Two said, “Sure, I am.”
- Participant Three simply said, “Yes.”
- Participant Four agreed, “Yes.”
- Participant Five said, “I had no problem sharing salvation with others before studying the book.”
- Participant Six said, “Yes.”
- Participant Seven said, “That is a challenge for me, I pray the Holy Spirit will guide me in these endeavors. People should see the Jesus in you, and you should not have to tell them you are a Christian.”
- Participant Eight said, “The more I study the Word and meditate on what it is saying to me, and looking back on how blessed I have been over the years, I have a testimony. God has brought me a long way. I can share His goodness with others.”

Question nine asked what was your response to new ideas and practices presented by the pastor and other church leaders?

- Participant One said, “I embrace everything the pastor does because there are good ideas coming from these sessions.”
- Participant Two said, “I am willing to help and share my time with all the ideas the pastor has for our church and my members.”
- Participant Three said, “The church must come up with new ideas if we are going to lead others to Christ.”
- Participant Four said, “Try to have an open mind. I may not agree, but if that is the church consensus, I will do my part.”
- Participant Five said, “It all depends on what the ideas and practices are. I have no problem as long as it is within the practices and guidelines that I’ve been taught and learned over the years as a Zionite.”
- Participant Six said, “I am accepting of the pastor’s ideas and of other leaders of the church because it’s for the growth of the church and God’s kingdom and not for selfish gain.”

- Participant Seven said, “I like to believe I am receptive to new ideas and like to think I will not hinder anyone with fresh ideas and support them.”
- Participant Eight said, “My responses to the ideas and practices presented by the pastor and church leaders have been warmly embraced. Personally, we needed change, but change has been swift. I am in the belief that if God’s not in it, it will not stand. I will do my part to help make it a success. Leaders must be led by Christ. It’s up to the individual to follow.”

Question ten asked what can we do to combat the thinking of some in the church who believe they and their loved ones are going to heaven someday because they are “good people?”

- Participant One said we must “be honest with them and let them know that just because you are good doesn’t mean you are going to Heaven, that you have to be born again.”
- Participant Two focuses on “sharing with someone who has two colors in their life, and I tell them there is a third; It takes God’s spirit to work and convict.” Participant Three said, “We know that being good or doing good will not get us to heaven. We must be born again.”
- Participant Four said, “Heaven is not guaranteed just because you are a good person. You tell them they must be saved and accept the Lord as their personal Savior.”
- Participant Five said, “My belief is that a person has to be born again, as Jesus taught, and have a relationship with God to get to Heaven. Just because the person may be a good person does not mean that they know the Lord. But I would like to believe and think that they are believers and that they know the Lord.”
- Participant Six said, “Discuss with them God’s word that that’s not possible. That you don’t get to Heaven by good deeds or being good. Explain to them that it’s by salvation and faith. Have classes on the topic.”
- Participant Seven said, “I say, what is their definition of ‘Good?’ I think everyone thinks they are good!! But we need to compare ourselves to God/Jesus, and we are filthy, and that’s hard for most to face. Plus, where is that saying in the Bible???”
- Participant Eight said, “Good people have skeletons too. We all have signed and fall short by thought, word, and deed. Only God knows the inner man. Thank God we all have an Advocate.”

In responding to the participants' responses to the post-survey questions, I found an often-repeated pattern. There was a willingness to continue learning and to accept that what had previously been learned was not necessarily biblically sound or authentically Methodist, which was one of the project's desired results. How can a church move forward if the leaders are stuck in the past and prefer to stay there? While there were several encouraging responses, I felt that the itinerant ministry that is so common in small churches brought about inexperienced pastoral leadership and entrenched lay participation in activities that preserve the status quo.

Personal Interview Questions

The initial question asked when did you accept Christ as your Lord and Savior?

- Participant One said, "The year was 1996, and I was going through a lot of circumstances."
- Participant Two said, "It was early manhood."
- Participant Three said they accepted Christ on "Second Sunday August-August 10, 1975."
- Participant Four accepted Christ "at the age of twelve years old."
- Participant Five said they accepted Christ "at the age of twenty-three."
- Participant Six said they accepted Christ "in 1990." Participant Eight said, "I accepted Christ as my Lord and Savior in 1986 in Anniston, Alabama. I had a visit early one Sunday morning. That day, I began to seek Him." Participant Nine said they accepted Christ "years ago."

Question two asked how long have you been a member of a local church?

- Participant One said they have been a member of a local church for "forty years."

- Participant Two said, “I don’t know. Never gave thought to keep a record.”
- Participant Three said they have been a member of a local church for “fifty-five years.”
- Participant Four said they have been a member of a local church for “fifty-nine years.”
- Participant Five said, “I’ve been in church all my life, but I joined the church at age twelve.”
- Participant Six said they have been a member of a local church “all my life; I was raised in Ardis Chapel.”
- Participant Eight said, “I have been a member of Sandy Ridge for twenty-three years. My family attended for two years before we joined in 2002. I attended Marable Memorial for close to one year.”
- Participant Nine said they have been a member of a local church since “1980.”

Question three asked can you define in your own words the difference between being a babe in Christ and a mature Christian? Which one are you?

- Participant One said, “A babe in Christ believes what they want to. They think all their ideas are good for the church. A mature Christian will listen to ideas without complaining. They will go strictly by the Book.”
- Participant Two said mature Christianity depends on their “knowledge in the word and how one conducts his or her everyday life in Christ.”
- Participant Three said, “Being a babe in Christ means you have probably just been converted, and you have not studied God’s words. Thus, you don’t know what the scriptures mean and how to apply them to your life. Being mature means you have studied scriptures, grown in your prayer life, your faith has become stronger, and the way you live can be a light, where others can see Christ through you.”
- Participant Four said they feel they are “a mature Christian.”
- Participant Five said, “A babe in Christ is a new convert. A mature Christian is someone who has been a believer for many years. I am a mature Christian. I’ve been a believer for many years and worked in the church also.”

- Participant Six said, “A babe in Christ is someone who has just accepted Christ, new to salvation. They are learning God’s statutes and what God requires of us. A babe in Christ can also be a person who has accepted Christ ten, twenty, or thirty years ago and has not grown in Christ. They are still babes, because they are still walking and participating in the world, the old has not passed away—not studying the Bible, not attending church or Bible study, but then again, they may be attending, studying, and the word is falling on stony ground, which means no growth is taking place. A mature Christian is a person who has accepted Christ’s salvation and is walking in a life of Christ. They attend church, Bible study, and study their Bible daily. A mature Christian does not just hear the Word but is one who applies the Word. They truly love the Lord and their neighbor, pay their tithes, and help when they see someone in need. A mature Christian has truly made a change in life, thought, word, and deed. You can see the growth. I am a mature Christian, growing daily by God’s grace and mercy.”
- Participant Eight said, “The difference between a babe in Christ is someone who does not fully understand the meaning of life with Christ. They do not have a desire to know the Lord for themselves. They may never have been exposed to the Word of God. They have a materialistic outlook on life’s possessions and money. A mature Christian seeks to know the life of Christ. They study the Word and have intimate communion, a prayer life, devoting time alone with Him. They desire to be spiritually connected to Christ. They are disciplined in spending time to be transformed into the likeness of Christ. There is a shift in all aspects of one’s life. You desire to love and serve others. You begin to walk, talk, think, and give like Christ. Personally, I am seeking to be better. Daily, I pressed on with perseverance. Though I stumble and trip, even get off balance, I still keep going. I place myself in the young adult Christian category.”
- Participant Nine said, “when you are a babe in Christ, you want to learn about Christ.” When you are a “mature Christian, you can help others grow in grace.”

Question four asked in what ways have these sessions improved your understanding of the work of the church?

- Participant One said, “I’ve always said that ‘a family that prays together stays together.’ We should be looking to build up the kingdom of God, not tear it down.”

- Participant Two said, “It has not improved but has reminded me that we all can do more in perfecting the saints.”
- Participant Three said, “The sessions have made me take a closer look at my personal life to see if my life lines up with the Word of God.
- Participant Four said, “I’ve learned more about different things about Christ.”
- Participant Five said, “I have had a few things cleared up that I wasn’t sure of. I really liked the triangle, to clear up and make God one.”
- Participant Six said, “The work of the church is to lead people to Christ by making disciples. These sessions have given me a better understanding of how small groups are important to the life of the church, by making disciples and maintaining them. The personal care that is given in small groups gives you a feeling of family, friendship, and fellowship, where you can express your fears. Failures and growths which allow you to grow in Christ as you study God’s Word.”
- Participant Eight said, “These sessions have opened more ways to connect small groups to the work of the church. It has helped me to understand the importance of the total body of the church. It is not the physical building but the people that make the church. We all have a responsibility, no matter how small it may seem to us. We all bring gifts. No gift is greater than another. No matter how young or old, we are a part of each other. We must be concerned about each other’s spiritual well-being as it relates to our lives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, after reviewing the notes from the group questions and responses from the seven sessions, the responses to the pre- and post-surveys, and the personal interviews, much information was collected that will contribute to my analysis and summary of the project. The participants were generally positive in their responses, 75% admitting that the biblical Great Commission mandate in Matthew 28:18-20 has not received the attention it should in every church. This admission, though, did not include many responses on how we should go forward.

I found that some participants were willing to undertake disciple-making activities but did not necessarily want these new initiatives to be put on the front burner, so to speak. Their priorities of weekly, monthly, and yearly activities superseded any plans to change the established routine. While I thought at first that any resistance to my hypothesis and its related goals and objectives would come down to age qualifiers, I was surprised to find resistance to change among some younger and older adults. This joint resistance across age categories also reflected family agreement, with grandchildren and children supporting the positions articulated by their grandparents and parents.

The project had input from non-participating members who wanted to know what was going on and how it would affect their regular church routine. For example, scheduling sessions at times brought about changes to the church's weekly schedule, causing Bible Study to be postponed or rescheduled to a more convenient time for the facilitators to work with the participants. The members who were not participants had to adjust their schedules accordingly. When we added evening sessions and virtual presentations, this became a dividing factor in gaining the group responses I desired. Some of our younger adults signed up for the night sessions but made little or no contribution. This was surprising since being tech-savvy is so associated with younger people.

Given the challenging responses from some participants, you might think the process would be discouraging; however, the positive responses from others kept me on course. We have witnessed an understanding of being Christ's ambassadors, His representatives tasked with carrying out His mandate to make disciples. Each standing ministry in the church has been challenged to facilitate outreach ministries, which are

actually disciple-making opportunities. The missionaries of Ardis Chapel carried out a food giveaway in the parking lot of some local businesses, with their approval, of course. The agreed-upon items were donated, and fifty bags were prepared. Our parking lot site was in an area frequented by homeless and needy people. Some of our members went to groups of potential recipients and encouraged them to come by our table, which had an Ardis Chapel sign on it. Other members took bags in their cars and went looking for others in need in nearby neighborhoods. We agreed to continue these efforts in the months ahead.

Another dynamic example of the need to rethink the church was our one-day noonday revival. This was a ministry project given to our Men's Boosters Ministry. While these men and their counterparts across our Salisbury District have been holding monthly breakfast meetings and yearly Sunday evening events, they were challenged to plan an order of worship and supervise a delicious fellowship meal. We had wonderful preaching, good music, and fine fellowship, so much so that not only are our men planning future noonday services, but visitors from other churches are planning to do the same.

The project hypothesis was the following: If members participate in a focus study on Christian Discipleship, then they will be equipped with the tools necessary to disciple others. The results of our course of study, response to discussion questions, and other noted changes in attitude indicate that the project was well received and the hypothesis goals were accomplished. So, Ardis Chapel will continue to embrace the church's primary directive from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, becoming a church that He is pleased with and a church that sets new ground for growth numerically and spiritually.

APPENDIX A
RECRUITMENT ADVERTISEMENT

My name is Carla Harrison, a doctoral student at United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio. I am the pastor of Ardis Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church. I am conducting a research project entitled “Discipleship Development That Transforms Congregational Norms”.

This project is designed as a focus study on Christian discipleship that will equip church members with the tools necessary to disciple others. The sign-up window is from May 16-30, 2025. The course of study will begin on June 16th, 2025. The course of study is open to the first 8-10 adults to respond to the invitation. I am reaching out to invite you to participate in this research. Your insights and experiences will provide valuable contributions to the study. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and will involve interviews, pre- and post-questionnaires, and group discussions. The time commitment will be approximately 2 hours. All data collected will be treated confidentially and used for research purposes. Mary Marlin is the Content Associate and will receive your responses at 704-433-1674 or by email at mmmarlin@bellsouth.net. If you agree to take part, Mary Marlin will contact you. Thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely, Rev. Carla Harrison Pastor Ardis Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church 980-622-7977.

APPENDIX B
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I am conducting a research study as part of my dissertation project in partial fulfillment of my Doctor of Ministry at United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio. Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated. Research Title: Discipleship Development That Transforms Congregational Norms Project Director: Contact email: Reverend Carla Harrison charrison1@united.edu.

Purpose of Study: This is a consent form for potential participants 18 years or older. You have an option to take part in a research study of the benefits of studying Christian discipleship, to be better equipped to disciple others. The goals of this form are to give you information about the study if you choose to take part and to help you decide if you want to be in the study.

Name of participant: _____
Please print first and last name

The Research Project: _____ This project addresses the need of the members of Ardis Chapel A. M.E Zion Church to disciple the people they encounter from the surrounding community. The research question is: if the members participate in a focus study on Christian discipleship, will they then be equipped with the tools necessary to disciple others.

Expectation of the Focus Study: _____ After my consent to participate in the study, I will complete a pre-survey that will provide initial input for the project. each week over the six weeks, I will attend and participate in the group discussions and interviews. At the proposed time, I will complete a post -survey that will provide data for the project.

Consent: _____ I agree to participate in this project as a human research subject. I understand that at any point in this project, I can withdraw my participation without explanation.

Confidentiality _____ I agree that if I become pregnant during this project, I will provide a doctor's note to continue my participation. This is for my safety as a protected, vulnerable population. I can withdraw my participation without explanation at any point in this project." _____ I do not foresee any risk in taking part in this research. My contribution to this study will be safeguarded from public view for the duration of the study.

Benefits of the Study _____ I understand that the benefit of participating in this research would be to develop a better understanding of the disciple-making process and how it will grow the church. Also, the participants of the study group will have the opportunity each week to build relationships, increase knowledge, and nurture one another in the faith. _____ I agree to join this study and offer my participation voluntarily and without coercion.

Contact: I am aware that I can contact the researcher, Reverend Carla Harrison, for answers to questions related to this study directly at telephone: 980-622-7977 or via

email at charrison1@united.edu.

Signature

(Volunteer) Date _____

Researcher Signature Date _____

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APPENDIX C

PRE- AND POST-SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. What would you say is “the mission of the church”?

(The reason the church exists.)

2. If Christianity were a crime, would there be enough evidence against you to find you “guilty as charged”?

(Worldly standards for being a Christian.)

3. How important is the experience of growing in grace and spiritual transformation to the new member of a church?

(Movement from a new member to an experienced one.)

4. Are all members of the church to be holy, or only those set apart for special service, such as ministers and deaconesses?

(Holiness as a defining term for Christians.)

5. How can we define the word “saint”?

(Sainthood is a standard for being a Christian or an option.)

6. If one has accepted Christ as Lord and Savior and joined a local church, how has that person’s previous behavior and thinking changed to be more like Jesus?

(Becoming a Christian.)

7. How do the daily or weekly activities of your church inform the unsaved about what the mission of the church really is?

(The witness of your church to the unsaved.)

8. Is there room for being an individual while be transformed into the image of Christ?

Are all Christians supposed to be alike?

(One in Christ and still yourself.)

9. Do you read/study your Bible daily? Are you a part of regular Bible Study activities in a small group or your local church at large?

(The importance of Bible Study.)

10. Do we get better, in service to the Lord, as we get older? Are we continuing to grow in usefulness, or do we reach a peak at some point?

(The process of Christian maturing.)

11. Do you feel prepared to share salvation with someone you may meet, as God gives you the opportunity?

(Sharing the faith.)

12. Have you ever thought that more discipleship and church growth will bring new members to the church, that you have to develop relationships with, and would rather have a fellowship only with the family and friends that currently make up your church?

(Receiving new members into the church)

13. Are preachers the only ones to proclaim the Gospel?

(Preaching versus proclaiming)

14. What do you do to keep your mind open to new ideas presented by the pastor and other church leaders?

(Embracing the new)

15. Does God's plan of salvation include spiritual growth and development for the saved, or is it just the proclaiming of the need for a decision to accept Christ by the preaching of the Word?

(The continued process of maturing in the faith.)

APPENDIX D
GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Session 1

Q1. What is a saint?

Q2. What does it mean to perfect the saints?

Session 2

Q1. How does a church's weekly activities define the mission of the church?

Q2. What immediate changes could be done to better reflect the desired mission of the church?

Q3. What is Christ's mandate for the church?

Session 3.

Q1. Who was John Wesley?

Q2. What is the nature of holiness or sanctification?

Session 4.

Q1. What role do small groups play in making disciples?

Q 2. Have you come to a new relationship with Christ by the means of a friend or relative?

Session 5.

Q 1. What role does proclaiming the Gospel have in disciple-making?

Q 2. What differences might we find in the approach of clergy and laity to the disciple-making process?

Q 3. Can you give examples of people doing things that appear to be of the church, but are actually not of the church?

Session 6

Q 1. Why must current members of the church adopt a new way of thinking to enable the discipling of new members?

Q 2. Why must new believers in Christ embrace a new way of thinking Individual?

APPENDIX E
PERFECTING THE SAINTS

Perfecting the Saints – Ephesians 4: 11-12 -The question is asked “ What is a saint ?”, as we begin this study. Seeking to nurture believers into mature Christians calls for a clear understanding of what it means to be set apart for God’s service. While historically, some have promoted the idea that only some people are set apart for such service, the bible clearly teaches that every believer who is in Christ and in whom Christ dwells is a saint. We also address the question “ What does it mean to perfect the saints?”, because some believe that sainthood is achieved by those who have demonstrated exceptional holiness and need no further improvements. The class will be taught that perfecting the saints is the primary purpose of church leadership and the secret of building up the Body of Christ.

Session 2: **Prioritizing Disciples Making** – Matthew 28:18-20- Participants will be asked “If you were to visit Earth from another planet, would you be able to determine the mission of a church from its day-to-day activities?” We will teach that activities define how some see the mission of their church and the church. For example, social media shows us many activities and announces events that are high priorities for some churches. This may include such things as selling dinners, sponsoring teas, and fashion shows, and providing funds to help the poor and needy. Even though these activities take place in churches, they are not indicative of the true mission of the church. Exploring the primary scripture text stated and other corresponding texts we will make the case that the mandate of Christ is for his church to make disciples.

Session 3: **Spreading Scriptural Holiness** – II Corinthians 7:1- John Welsey, the founder of Methodism, stressed that the purpose of the people called Methodists is to *spread scriptural holiness throughout the land*. For Welsey, it was not enough to pursue

holiness; holiness must be spread; it must be made certain that the holiness that is pursued and spread is consistent with that which is plainly taught in the word of God. In addressing the spreading of scriptural holiness, we will consider the question “What is the nature of holiness or sanctification?” We will also study the significance and the means of holiness or sanctification.

Session 4: Utilizing Holistic Small Groups- Mark 3:13-14- This session will examine the question, “How can the church better utilize small groups to make Christian disciples?” It has been noted that between 75% and 90% of people come to their new relationship with Christ and their church by means of a friend or a relative. Such relationships, when approached as small groups in the household of faith, are highly effective ministry tools to grow the church.

Session 5: Proclaiming the Gospel- Romans 15:18-19- This session will explore the answer to this question – “What role does proclaiming the gospel have in disciple-making?” Paul, in our text, states he has fully proclaimed to good news of Jesus Christ. Are we producing clergy and laity in our time that can say the same? Paul also knew that the gospel is needed to make disciples of Christ. Without it, people can do things that appear to be of the church, but they fail to be the church.

Session 6: Renewing the Mind- Romans 12:2/ Ephesians 4:23-Summary of Course of Study- Membership in the church calls for a new way of thinking that will enable converts to be teachable and grow in grace. This session will address the question “Why must new believers in Christ embrace a new way of thinking? “A change in how we view and use the bible will be a part of this renewal, seeing the preaching ministry, the

teaching ministry, and daily bible reading and study as essential aspects of our Christ journey.

The summary will address key components of the six sessions, highlighting the most salient points that should influence the participants in the disciple-making process. The desired goal of the sessions is reflected in a response to each question that follow.

Q1. When did you accept Christ as your Lord and Savior?

Q2. How long have you been a member of a local church?

Q3. Can you define in your own words the difference between being a babe in Christ and a mature Christian? Which one are you?

Q4. In what ways have these sessions improved your understanding of the work of the church?

APPENDIX F

PERSONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Q1. When did you accept Christ as your Lord and Savior?

Q2. How long have you been a member of a local church?

Q3. Can you define in your own words the difference between being a babe in Christ and a mature Christian? Which one are you?

Q4. In what ways have these sessions improved your understanding of the work of the church?

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